

February2016

FYI LETTERS

- The abbreviation “FYI” stands for “for your information,” and an FYI letter does just that: transmits short bits of information. Typically this is information the reader needs to know now or needs as reference, or is information that you want to tell him.
- FYIs can be used to discuss current events or something that would impact the reader down the road (e.g., a policy change taking effect the following year). It can be something as simple as a self-stick note stating, “FYI: I thought this article would be of interest” or a letter sent to an association’s members alerting them that a new president is being elected.

- **Format:** Simple format for letters and memos.]
Business or personal letterhead.
- **Style/Tone/Voice:** Can be informal or formal, depending on the content. Active tone or voice.
- **Structure:**(1) Call reader's attention, (2) Explain details, (3) Ask for action, if necessary, (4) Ask the reader to contact you with questions or concerns.
- **Handy Phrases:** FYI; For your information; Thought you'd like to know; Please call me if you have any questions.

Mr. Mike Hernandez
Alchemy Consulting
123 Main Street
Anytown, USA
Re: Liability insurance premiums

Dear Mike:

You're right. The premium for the policy we proposed is higher than the other companies pro-vided you with quotes.

However, our policy gives you broader liability coverage, with a much smaller deductible, as explained in the comparison table attached.

We can offer a policy with equivalent terms to the other insurance companies who quoted you, at approximately the same premium.

The problem is, this level of coverage excludes the precise situations for which you want the most protection!

Please let me know which option you prefer. Thanks.

Sincerely,
Joe Carlson, Agent
Continental Insurance
Enclosure

SAP: SUBJECT, AUDIENCE, PURPOSE

- SAP analysis is a process that quickly enables you to pin down the content and organization of your letter. The process requires you to ask and answer three questions:
 - • **What is the subject** (topic) of your letter?
 - • **Who is your audience?** (Who will be receiving your letter?)
 - • **What is the purpose** of your letter?

The 3-Step Writing Process

- Often when people write, they're afraid to make mistakes, and so they edit themselves word by word, inhibiting the natural flow of ideas and sentences. But professional writers know that writing is a process consisting of numerous drafts, rewrites, deletions, and revisions. Rarely does a writer produce a perfect manuscript on the first try. The task ideally should be divided into three steps: writing, rewriting, and polishing.
- **1. Writing.** Most professional writers go through a minimum of three drafts. The first is this initial “go with the flow” draft where the words come tumbling out. When you sit down to write, let the words flow freely. Don't worry about style, syntax, punctuation, or typos — just write. You can always go back and fix it later. By “letting it all out,” you build momentum and overcome inhibitions that block your ability to write and think.
- **2. Rewriting.** In the second draft — the rewriting step — you take a critical look at what you've written. You edit for organization, logic, content, and persuasiveness. Using your PC, you add, delete, and rearrange paragraphs. You rewrite jumbled passages to make them clear.
- **3. Polishing.** In the third draft, you give your prose a final polishing by editing for style, syntax, spelling, and punctuation. This is the step where you worry about things like consistency in numbers, units of measure, equations, symbols, abbreviations, and capitalization.

Rules for Better Letter Writing

- 1. PRESENT YOUR BEST SELF

A Tip: Never write a letter when angry. If you must write the letter when angry, then put it aside without sending it, and come back to it later. You will most likely want to throw it out and start over, not send it at all, or drastically revise it.

2. WRITE IN A CLEAR, CONVERSATIONAL STYLE

- The key to success in business or technical writing? Keep it simple. I've said this before, but it bears repeating: Write to express — not to impress. A relaxed, conversational style can add vigor and clarity to your letters.

3. BE CONCISE

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| • Wordy phrase Suggested | substitute |
| • during the course of | during |
| • in the form of | as |
| • in many cases | often |
| • in the event of | if |
| • exhibits the ability to | can |

4. BE CONSISTENT

- Good writers strive for consistency in their use of numbers, hyphens, units of measure, punctuation, equations, grammar, symbols, capitalization, technical terms, and
- abbreviations. Keep in mind that if you are inconsistent in any of these matters of
- usage, you are automatically wrong at least part of the time.

5. USE JARGON SPARINGLY

- Many disciplines and specialties have a special language all their own. Technical terms are a helpful shorthand when you're communicating within the profession, but they may confuse readers who do not have your special background. Take the word, "yield," for example. To a chemical engineer, yield is a measure of how much product a reaction produces. But to car drivers, yield means slowing down (and stopping, if necessary) at an intersection.

6. AVOID BIG WORDS

Big word

Beverage

Dentition

Eliminate

furnish

incombustible

Prioritize

Substantiate

Terminate

Utilize

Substitution

drink

teeth

get rid of

give, provide

fireproof

put in order

prove

end

use

7. PREFER THE SPECIFIC TO THE GENERAL

- Your readers want information — facts, figures, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Do not be content to say something is good, bad, fast, or slow when you can say how good, how bad, how fast, or how slow. Be specific whenever possible.

General

a tall building

plant

heavy equipment

unit

unfavorable

structural degradation

Disturbance

high performance

creature

laboratory

Specific

a 20-story building

oil refinery

equipment weighing over 10 tons

apartment

weather conditions rain (snow, etc.)

a leaky roof

riot

95% efficiency

dog (cat, etc.)

apparatus test tube

8. BREAK UP YOUR WRITING INTO SHORT SECTIONS

- Long, unbroken blocks of text are stumbling blocks that intimidate and bore readers.
- Breaking up your writing into short sections and short paragraphs — as in this book — makes the text easier to read.
- If your paragraphs are too long, go through them. Wherever a new thought starts, type a return and start a new paragraph.
- In the same way, short sentences are easier to grasp than long ones. A good guide for keeping sentence length under control is to write sentences that can be spoken aloud without losing your breath (do not take a deep breath before doing this test).

9. USE VISUALS

Drawings, graphs, and other visuals can reinforce your text. In fact, pictures often communicate better than words; we remember 10 percent of what we read, but 30 percent of what we see.

Type of visual	This shows . . .
Photograph	-what something looks like
Map . . .	where it is located
Exploded view . . .	how it is put together
Schematic diagram . . .	how it works or is organized
Graph . . .	how much there is (quantity)

10. USE THE ACTIVE VOICE

- In the active voice, action is expressed directly: “John performed the experiment.” In the passive voice, the action is indirect: “The experiment was performed by John.”

- Passive voice

Active voice

Grandma’s apple pie was enjoyed by everyone in the family.

Everyone in the family enjoyed Grandma’s apple pie.

- A good time was had by all.
- We all had a good time.

11. ORGANIZATION

- Poor organization is the number one problem in letter writing. Before you write, plan.
- Once you have an outline with sections and subsections, you can organize your information by putting it on index cards. Each card gets a heading outline. Or — using your personal computer — you can cut and paste the information within a word-processing file.

12. LENGTH

- Whenever possible, keep your letter to one page. Today's busy readers really appreciate seeing that everything is on one side of a sheet of paper. Even Winston Churchill used to require of those serving under him that they express their concerns on no more than one side of a single sheet of paper.

• Proofreading Tips

- It may be unfair, but people judge you by the words you use. They also judge you by whether you spell those words correctly, which is why proofreading is so important.
- In today's computer age, nearly everyone has spell-checking capability — often as part of an e-mail or word-processing program. You should run your copy through the spell-checker, but doing that alone is not enough. Recently an executive at a Big Six accounting firm sent a letter he had spell-checked to an important client, only to discover that he had described himself as a “Certified Pubic Accountant”!
- Proof everything you write, but be aware that the more times you write and rewrite a document, the less able you become to proof it effectively. For this reason, you should have “volunteer proofreaders” lined up — coworkers, assistants, and colleagues — who can proof your letters on short notice.
- If you have to proofread a document you have already written, rewritten, and read several times, here's a way to catch typos despite your reading fatigue: Proofread the document backward. Doing so forces you to read each word individually, and eliminates the natural tendency to concentrate on the whole sentence and its content. Result: You proof each word more carefully, and catch more typos.