

### **English Corner**



Dr Mable Chan is a lecturer in the Department of English, Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She was awarded the *Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching* in the 2005/2006 academic year. Based on her vast experience teaching academic and business English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, in this column she introduces interesting and fascinating points about business English.

The last five issues of English Corner have provided brief background information about the features of business English, differences between spoken English and written English, and ways to ensure cohesion in writing. This issue and the coming issue focus on the format and style of letters and email messages, paving the way for the introduction of different communicative functions in future issues (e.g. conveying negative messages, goodwill messages, making and answering enquiries and complaints).

#### **Letter layouts**

Though it has been shown that sending letters is less popular than sending email in today's business world (Cheng 2008), we still use letters for certain communicative purposes (such as job applications, sales correspondences and invitations). It is still important that we understand letter layout and format.

There are five different letter layouts available: **full-blocked**, **blocked**, **semi-blocked**, **square-blocked** and **simplified**. All letter layouts can be used, but the most important point is to be consistent. Don't try to mix the features of each and form your own style. Read the following samples and learn the features of each.

continue...



**(a) Full-blocked style**

- All parts of the letter start at the left margin.
- Most popular style in use today.

**(b) Blocked style**

- Similar to the full-blocked style, but some parts of the letter do not start at the left margin.
- The date may be right justified or may start halfway across the page; the subject line is centred or indented 5 or 10 spaces; the closing phrase, the signature and the writer's name and position start halfway across the page.

<p><b>Mable Chan English Learning Centre</b>          28 Kowloon Road          Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong          Tel: 2888 9999 Fax: 2999 8888</p>	<p><b>Mable Chan English Learning Centre</b>          28 Kowloon Road          Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong          Tel: 2888 9999 Fax: 2999 8888</p>
<p>9 September 20—</p>	<p>9 September 20—</p>
<p>Ms Mary Wong          18 Nathan Road          Mongkok</p>	<p>Ms Mary Wong          18 Nathan Road          Mongkok</p>
<p>Dear Ms Wong</p>	<p>Dear Ms Wong</p>
<p><b>Your Enquiry about AG888</b></p>	<p><b>Your Enquiry about AG888</b></p>
<p>Thank you for your letter dated 8 September 2009 concerning the new business English course (AG888) offered by our Centre.</p>	<p>Thank you for your letter dated 8 September 2009 concerning the new business English course (AG888) offered by our Centre.</p>
<p>The new business English course is tailor-made to address the needs of working adults who intend to master the skills of effective writing and speaking in the workplace. There is no prerequisite for application, and anyone interested in the course can join now to enjoy the early-bird discount.</p>	<p>The new business English course is tailor-made to address the needs of working adults who intend to master the skills of effective writing and speaking in the workplace. There is no prerequisite for application, and anyone interested in the course can join now to enjoy the early-bird discount.</p>
<p>Seats are limited. Fill in the application form on or before 18 September 20— for registration. Call our 24-hour customer hotline at 2898 8989 for further queries and questions. Thank you.</p>	<p>Seats are limited. Fill in the application form on or before 18 September 20— for registration. Call our 24-hour customer hotline at 2898 8989 for further queries and questions. Thank you.</p>
<p>Yours sincerely</p>	<p>Yours sincerely</p>
<p>Chan Mable          Mable Chan (Dr)</p>	<p>Chan Mable          Mable Chan (Dr)</p>
<p>Director          MC: cu          cc: M Leung (Manager)</p>	<p>Director          MC: cu          cc: M Leung (Manager)</p>

**(c) Semi-blocked style**

- Similar to blocked style
- Every paragraph is indented 5 to 10 spaces.
- The closing phrase, the signature and the writer's name and position start halfway across the page.

**(d) Square-blocked style**

- The date is on the same line as the first line of the recipient's address, and is right justified.
- Reference initials and enclosures are on the same level as the writer's name, ending at the right margin.
- The end result looks like a square and some people find this layout attractive.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mable Chan English Learning Centre</b>          28 Kowloon Road          Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong          Tel: 2888 9999      Fax: 2999 8888</p> <p style="text-align: right;">9 September 20—</p> <p>Ms Mary Wong          18 Nathan Road          Mongkok</p> <p>Dear Ms Wong</p> <p><b>Your Enquiry about AG888</b></p> <p>Thank you for your letter dated 8 September 2009 concerning the new business English course (AG888) offered by our Centre.</p> <p>The new business English course is tailor-made to address the needs of working adults who intend to master the skills of effective writing and speaking in the workplace. There is no prerequisite for application, and anyone interested in the course can join now to enjoy the early-bird discount.</p> <p>Seats are limited. Fill in the application form on or before 18 September 20— for registration. Call our 24-hour customer hotline at 2898 8989 for further queries and questions. Thank you.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yours sincerely</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Chan Mable          Mable Chan (Dr)          Director</p> <p>MC: cu          cc: M Leung (Manager)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mable Chan English Learning Centre</b>          28 Kowloon Road          Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong          Tel: 2888 9999      Fax: 2999 8888</p> <p>Ms Mary Wong                      9 September 20—          18 Nathan Road          Mongkok</p> <p>Dear Ms Wong</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Your Enquiry about AG888</b></p> <p>Thank you for your letter dated 8 September 2009 concerning the new business English course offered by our Centre.</p> <p>The new business English course is tailor-made to address the needs of working adults who intend to master the skills of effective writing and speaking in the workplace. There is no prerequisite and anyone interested in the course can enroll now to enjoy the early-bird discount.</p> <p>Seats are limited. Fill in the attached application form on or before 18 September 20— for registration. Call our 24-hour customer hotline at 2898 8989 for further queries and questions. Thank you.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yours sincerely</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Chan Mable          Mable Chan (Dr)                      MC: cu          Director                                      cc: M Leung (Manager)</p>
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**(e) Simplified style**

- A rather recent letter layout but not very popular.
- Some information is missing in this layout. For example, there is no salutation or closing phrase; both the subject line and the writer's name are capitalized; lists are indented 5 or 10 spaces unless if they are numbered or lettered.

**Mable Chan English Learning Centre**  
28 Kowloon Road  
Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong  
Tel: 2888 9999      Fax: 2999 8888

9 September 2009

Ms Mary Wong  
18 Nathan Road  
Mongkok

**YOUR ENQUIRY ABOUT AG888**

Thank you for your letter dated 8 September 2009 concerning the new business English course offered by our Centre.

The new business English course is tailor-made to address the needs of working adults who intend to master the skills of effective writing and speaking in the workplace. There is no prerequisite for application, and anyone interested in the course can enroll now to enjoy the early-bird discount.

Seats are limited. Fill in the application form on or before 18 September 20— for registration. Call our 24-hour customer hotline at 2898 8989 for further queries and questions. Thank you.

Chan Mable

**MABLE CHAN (DR)**  
Director  
MC: cu  
cc: M Leung (Manager)



**Quiz:**

**1. Which of the following date formats is correct to use in a letter?**

- a. 8.9.2009
  - b. 19 Sep 2009
  - c. September 19 2009
  - d. 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009
  - e. None of the above
- 

**2. When should we use 'Yours faithfully' and 'Yours sincerely' as the closing phrase?**

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**3. Which of the following ways of indicating there is an enclosure with a letter is/are correct?**

- a. Brochure 2009 enclosed
  - b. 2 Enc./Enclosures 2
  - c. Enclosure
  - d. Enclosures:
    - 1. 2009 product list
    - 2. Leaflets
  - e. All of the above
- 

**Key:**

1. The answer is 'e'. There are two models for you to choose from: day/month/year; month/day/year. If you use the latter one, there should be a comma after the day. Do not use the abbreviated form of the date as in 'a' as it will lead to ambiguity (in this example the month is August in the American context and September in the British context). Do not shorten the spelling of the month as in 'b', and no abbreviated ordinal number should be used (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>).
2. *Yours sincerely* is used when the writer addresses the recipient using his/her name/last name (e.g. Dear Mr./Ms/Mrs. Chan/Wong). *Yours faithfully* is used in conjunction with *Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Sir or Madam/Dear Sirs*. Remember to use small letter for 's' or 'f' in the second word.
3. The answer is 'e'. All ways are alright in indicating that something is appended to the letter. You can simply indicate that there is an enclosure. You can also indicate the number of enclosures or specify what you have enclosed.

**References:**

Cheng, W. (2008). International English and professional literacy. Invitation to Partnerships in Action: Research, Practice & Training. Inaugural Conference of the Asia-Pacific Rim LSP and Professional Communication Association, 8-10 Dec 2008.