

Letter Writing Right and Proper

By Katie Clark

With today's technology we can send messages across the world in three seconds. In this fast-paced world, who needs to write a letter? With email, fax machines, and telephones (and the list goes on), who needs a good old-fashioned piece of paper and a pencil? Unfortunately, this is the view of most people today. According to the U.S. Postal Service's website, mail traffic has gone down by over five million pieces per year since the year 2000. In 2001 it was estimated that over 12 billion emails were sent per day. Today, the average per day is about 30 billion, and the average person sends 6.4 emails per day. This is likely due to the above-mentioned quickness of technology.

Despite this, sometimes—whether it is the required way to communicate or simply the polite thing to do—a letter is in order. While we may know how to write a proper letter if the need arises, more likely than not, our children don't.

So how do we teach kids to write a proper letter, and how do we make them want to? First, we need to know how. Here are some of the basic steps in letter writing.

In several situations, a letter is either expected or very kind:

- Thank-you notes are given when you receive a gift or someone does something kind for you. They should be addressed to the person(s) you're thanking.
- Bed-and-breakfast notes are given when you stay with someone for a long period of time, such as going out of town to stay with family or friends. They should be addressed to the owner(s) of the home.
- Friendly notes are your average "How are you?" notes.
- Business letters are sent to professionals in some field. They are addressed to a specific person, if available. Business letters are sent in several situations. You might write a letter to place an order, to send a complaint, or to try to sell something. You might write to a senator or the president of a company.

Next, remember that there are five parts to a letter: contact information, date, greeting or salutation, body, and closing and signature. Every letter should have each of these.

Contact Information

It's kind to include contact information so that the person receiving the letter has your current name and address. The contact information should be written in the top, left-hand corner of the first page. It should include your name, address, and phone number or email address, if you want to tell it. Here's an example:

Katie Clark
12345 Anywhere St.
Anytown, USA 00000
phone or e-mail

A business letter is a little different. While you include only your own contact information in a personal letter, in a business letter, you also include the name and address of the person and/or place you are writing to. In this case, your contact information should go in the top-middle of the page. The receiver's information should go below that, on the left-hand side of the page.

Date

Write the date in the top, right-hand corner of the first page. This will let your friend know how old the letter is. Here are a few examples of ways to write a date:

December 1, 2005
12/1/05
12-1-05

Greeting

The greeting is the first words you write to your friend. It usually starts like this: Dear So-and-So. The first letter of every word of the greeting should be capitalized. In a business letter, you should never use the person's first name. Also, use a colon instead of a comma. Here is an example of what the greeting should look like:

Dear Mr. Smith:

Body

Next comes the body of the letter. This is the actual letter. Remember to start a new paragraph for each subject you write about. Each new paragraph should be indented five spaces.

Closing

Last is the closing. The closing is the signoff, such as: Love; Sincerely; Respectfully; Yours truly; and Your friend. Only the first word of the closing should be capitalized. All of the words following the first word should be lowercase. Here's an example:

Your best friend, or
Yours truly,

Other simple rules to remember are always to use a comma after the greeting and closing. Also, you can add a postscript, or a PS., for things you forgot to write in the body of the letter.

Use these easy guidelines, and you'll be on the right road to writing good letters!

So you know how to write a proper letter. But in this fast-paced world, how do you make your child want to learn? How do you make it fun? The same way you make any other subject fun. Teaching methods.

Make learning fun by switching the atmosphere. Write notes on a board, whether you have a chalkboard or a dry erase board. Ask questions and let the kids answer. Play a game. Try doing fun exercises like writing letters to famous people they would like to meet. You could also have them write a letter to a historical figure, trying to use the language that would have been used in that time period.

Teaching letter writing is not a hard venture, but it is one that is being lost today.

Don't let this pastime die away. Teach proper letter writing!

Biographical Information

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Katie Clark graduated from the Institute of Children's Literature and writes for children and adults alike. Besides writing for children, she enjoys teaching them. Katie teaches a 3-year-old preschool class and loves every minute of it! She lives in Alabama with her husband and her 20-pound cat, Spot.