



Top tips for letter writing

Tips and ideas for writing formal and informal letters

Age 6-11

CFE First and Second Level

Resource created by
Scottish Book Trust

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About this resource

This resource contains tips and activity ideas to support pupils writing letters in class. In our modern world of social media and technology, communication has never been so fast or so easy. However, letter writing is having a comeback, and taking time to write a personal letter to someone will always be valued. But it is also a skill, and a skill that pupils will need throughout life. The aim of this resource is to offer hints and tips to help you and your pupils create fun and enjoyable activities around letter writing. The resource also contains ideas to support writing for a purpose, and using letter writing to engage with the wider community.

Introducing letter writing

Let pupils know that you are going to be writing a letter, together or individually. Before you start writing, take a moment to talk to pupils about their experience of letter writing, as it may be unfamiliar to many. Ask pupils:

- When did you last receive a letter?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - What did you do with it?
- When did you last write a letter?
- When or why might you write a letter?

Discuss these questions as a class, or in smaller groups. Ask pupils to brainstorm ideas on a board- especially for the last question. Encourage pupils to think about different scenarios and situations when letter writing would be a useful skill or tool.

If pupils are unfamiliar with letters, bring examples to show pupils. This could be examples from a book. Books written in letters are called epistolary novels, and one great book to use is *Dear Professor Whale* by Megumi Iwasa, as it is suitable for Primary 3 upwards. More examples of epistolary novels can be found in the booklist at the end of this resource. You could also show pupils letters sent to the class or school.

Formal letter writing

Most of us don't write formal letters on a regular basis, and are far more likely to send an email than write a formal letter. But there are still occasions when a formal letter is needed. For example:

- To introducing yourself to a member of the community, if you are part of an [intergenerational writing project](#) with a local care provider and want to introduce yourself before meeting in person.
- Writing a formal letter to your local councillor or Member of Parliament to persuade them to support a cause close to your heart.
- Writing to a member of the community to invite them to attend a school event.
- Writing a cover letter as part of a job application.

Some of these might have been mentioned in the initial discussion on letter writing. Explain to pupils that all these occasions would require a more formal letter, with a structure (see appendix 1 for a template). This final example could link to discussions and activities around the World of Work and developing the Young Workforce.

For persuasive letter writing, such as to an MP, Education Scotland has an excellent resource to support pupils to [write a persuasive letter](#).

Activity

Work with pupils to choose what they would like to write a letter about, or who they would like to write it to. It could be for one of the reasons mentioned above, or could link to a class project or novel. Perhaps pupils would like to write to an author to ask about characters or plot!

Share the letter template (appendix 1) with pupils and ask them to write in their details, as well as note what they would like to write in each paragraph. Once they have finished the template, they can rewrite their letter in full so it is ready to send.

For persuasive writing, ask pupils to read their letters aloud to the class and encourage constructive feedback. Do peers think a good point was made? Was the letter convincing? Is there anything else they could add to persuade the reader? What persuasive language did they use? Was the letter well-structured and was their argument clear to follow?

Informal letter writing

Writing letters is a great way to keep in touch, and historically was people's only way of communicating with family and friends. You can read letters sent during World War I from the [Imperial War Museum](#). Looking at these letters might offer an opportunity to reflect on how we communicate and stay connected today. Discuss this as a class.

Today, letters are a great way to form strong bonds and keep connections, as well as share thoughts and feelings. Taking the time to write a letter, especially to a loved one, is a great way to show you value that person.

If you are writing to a friend or family member, a pen pal, or someone else you know, you don't need to worry about structuring your letter as carefully as the formal letter. However, it's still good to create a plan to avoid losing your train of thought or getting muddled. Here are some tips to help plan your letter:

- How do you want to start your letter?
- What do you want to discuss or include? Is it about what you did recently, or a specific topic you want to share?
- Always include questions to encourage a letter back!
- How will you end your letter?

Ask pupils to plan and then write a more informal letter, possibly to a pen pal or friend. Once they have written the letter, encourage them to post it. You could create your own letterbox in class and encourage pupils to post their letters and write back to each other to practice their writing skills.

Writing postcards

We might be familiar with writing or receiving postcards from holidays. You could ask pupils to bring in examples they have received from home, creating a postcard map or display. Postcards offer a much smaller space in which to write, meaning that pupils need to practice being concise and will need to choose their words carefully.

First, ask pupils to think about who they are sending their postcard to, and then plan what they would like to write. They might like to practice before writing the final version on their postcard (see appendix 2 for template).

Pupils can also decorate the other side of their postcard- perhaps drawing an image that relates to their message. You could post these to a partner school or pen pal, or send the postcards internally as part of a buddy system. Pupils could send postcards to buddies in a lower year with tips to help with transition, or ideas to support wellbeing.

Final tips for letter writing

- Think about who you are writing for. It is a friend, a family member or a stranger? How and what you write will differ depending on who it is for. Adapt your writing style depending on who it is for. Do you need to be formal or can you be more relaxed?
- What is the aim of your letter? To inform, convey information or persuade? Knowing the aim of your letter will help you plan or structure it.
- A tip for remembering whether to use 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully': You are always sincere with someone you know.
- How do you want the reader to feel? This is especially important if you are writing to persuade them to follow your viewpoint, or change their opinion.
- What will your reader enjoy? For informal letters, you might want to include drawings or doodles you know the reader will like, or which brings back a memory you both share. Be creative!
- Remember to include questions to encourage them to answer and write back!

Appendix 1: Formal letter template

School address:

Recipients address:

Today's date:

Dear [If unknown 'To Whom it may concern']

Introduction: tell the reader why you are writing and what the purpose of your letter is.

The main part of your letter, this could be one or two paragraphs. What do you want to say or convey? Try to be concise and clear.

Closing paragraph: summarise

Yours sincerely, [Use sincerely if you know who you are writing to, if it is unknown use faithfully]

Your name

Appendix 2: Postcard template

Please place postage here

Please place postage here

Book recommendations

Dear Professor Whale written by Megumi Iwasa, illustrated by Jun Takabatake

Yours Sincerely Giraffe written by Megumi Iwasa, illustrated by Jun Takabatake

The Day the Crayons Quit written by Drew Daywalt, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

They Day the Crayons Came Home written by Drew Daywalt, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

To Night Owl from Dogfish by Holly Goldberg-Sloan and Meg Wolitzer