



The Lost Art of Letter Writing

A Talking Points lesson for
English reading & speaking

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Introduction

Have you ever written a letter?

If so, what was the letter about?

Who was it for?

Do people still write letters in your country?

If so, why?

The Lost Art of Letter Writing

When was the last time you wrote a letter?

People used to write them years ago because they had no choice. There was no internet and if you wanted to express your thoughts to someone far away, there were only two ways to do it — a phone call or writing a letter.

The writing of letters was an art form. So much so that letters from artists, writers and famous politicians have been published into books.

Young children up until the dawn of email wrote letters to their grandparents or uncles and aunts, expressing gratitude for birthday gifts received or just to say something simple.

People looked forward to receiving letters. They were treasured and revered, kept under lock and key in many circumstances, in special boxes, or even just an old shoe box.

But never thrown away.

The reader respected the letters they received, knowing that the sender had taken time to write them and put much thought into the words written on each page.

What happened to the art of letter writing?

The advent of certain technology caused people to stop writing letters so often. People made use of their mobile phones on a regular basis. We could now make phone calls anywhere and it just became so much more convenient to make a call instead of putting pen to paper.

Then email arrived, and that became the death of letter writing.

Why go through all the effort of writing a letter, putting it into an envelope, going to the post office to buy a stamp, and putting the letter into a letterbox when you could just type out a few sentences and press send?

With faster forms of communication, people just wanted the ease and speed of email.

By the time instant messaging became popular, letter writing became a distant memory of the past. In fact, people then talked about the death of email as people found it easier to communicate via messaging platforms.

But many people believe that the death of letter writing first started when people no longer took an effort in their handwriting.

At one time, beautiful handwriting was respected and made letters all the more of a joy to read. Once that stopped, the letters became merely functional.

Just a means of passing on a simple message.

Suffice to say, that very few people write letters today.

Few grandparents receive letters in the post from their grandchildren thanking them for a Christmas gift. Lovers these days express their feelings via text messages and emojis.

The art of letter writing seems lost forever.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Why did people write letters years ago?

What two ways could people communicate over long distances?

Whose letters have been published into books?

Who did young children write to in their letters?

What are two of the places where people might have kept their old letters?

What was the first form of technology that had an effect on letter writing?

What was the second form of technology that may have ended letter writing altogether?

How many people communicate today?

Essential Vocabulary

art form	published	dawn
gratitude	treasured	revered
kept under lock and key	circumstances	advent
instant messaging	a distant memory	platforms
handwriting	joy	functional
suffice to say	emoji	

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Art form – *any activity done by a person that is regarded by others as done to a high skill level.*

Published – *writing that is presented to the public usually in the form of a book or magazine.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

John is very good at skateboarding. He raises it to a kind of art form.

Marie was very happy to hear that one of her poems had been published in a magazine.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever written a letter? Tell the class about it.

Is the art of letter writing lost forever? Why/why not?

Do you think the art of letter writing should or could be revived? Why/why not?

Who would you write a letter to today? Why would you write a letter to this person? What would you say in your letter?

Do you agree with the article about handwriting being partly responsible for the death of letter writing? Why/why not? Has the art of good handwriting gone out of fashion? Why?

Do you think children should be encouraged to write letters to family members such as their grandparents? What purpose could this serve?

What kind of subjects could be expressed better in a letter than an email or an instant message?

Have you ever received a letter in your life that had a very big effect on you? What was the letter?

Have you ever received a love letter? How did it make you feel? Can you talk about it in class?

Do you have any old letters kept in a shoe box or somewhere

safe? Why do you keep them? What is their value?

What differences are there in expressing something by letter, email or instant message? What are the differences in style?

How is letter writing regarded in your country? Does it have a long tradition?

Do your parents or grandparents have any old letters? Who are they from? And why do they keep them?

Writing

This is a letter-writing exercise.

You are going to write a letter. You can choose from one of the prompts below.

To Your Teacher

Write a letter to your teacher, thanking them for all their guidance and support, and to show gratitude for how they have helped you.

To Your Mother or Father

Write a letter to your mother or father. Thank them for bringing you into this world and for helping you to grow into the person you have become today. Express gratitude for taking care of you and teaching you about life and the world.

To Your Friend

Write a letter to your friend. Thank them for being so loyal and such a great friend. Share some of the great stories that you have together. Tell them how much you care about them.

To A Local Politician

Write a letter to a local government worker. Tell them about a problem or social issue that you often think about in your hometown. Tell them what you would like to see done about this problem and how to fix it.

To An Old Neighbour

Write a letter to an old neighbour. Introduce yourself to this person. Tell them about your life and what you do. Offer to give them some help in their life too.

To Yourself

Write a letter to yourself. Talk about your dreams and aspirations. Give yourself some advice on how to live a good life. Offer some ways to realise all your goals and ambitions in life.

Take some time to write your letter.

When you have finished, read your letter out loud in the class.

Ask your classmates for feedback!

Credits

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