

The Art of Writing Handwriting Letters and Notes

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“A good handwriting letter is a creative act, and not just because it is a visual and tactical pleasure. It is a deliberate act of exposure, a form of vulnerability, because handwriting opens a window on the soul in a way that cyber communication can never do. You savor their arrival and later take care to place them in a box for safe keeping.” (John O’Connor, 2012)

“A Letter for My Mom”

This is a letter for you, my mom,
Sometimes, I get very numb.
How are you, my dove?
I hope you are fine, my love
I miss you so much –
A can’t this subject to touch!
You patiently wait and wait
For a call to talk and to ask ...

“Where is my letter?
What is the matter?
You do not care
If there is no news:
The same news,
Good news, bad news,
Old news, my news,
Sometimes, I’m-glad-I-had news.
Just any news!
Is a lot to ask??!”

I need a brain that is brilliant,
I need a brain that thinks.
I need a head that ready to finish
The letter with all my news.

“All the best, love and kisses” in ink and paper...
Instead, I care an unfinished letter.

Ida Tomshinsky © 2003

Once upon a time it was a little girl who just learned how to write letters of alphabet and put them together. She did not know yet the right spelling of words and ask her mom to right down the words for her on piece of paper that she could copy them on the holiday greeting cards. And the world would know that the girl is not little anymore and that one more person obtained literacy and is learning to read and write with a proudly display. Who does not remember to receive a card written by a niece or nephew? All these cards and creative home-made envelopes, letters written by children were then read with a smile and put away in an old sentimental purse or a shoe box with other letters as kept memorabilia.

Almost every household would have saved and cherish letters from fathers or an uncle who send them from a military base or from far away battlefields of war. In my family it was letters from my aunt Paula to my father written during World War II on paper from covers of old school notebooks and then fold to look as an envelope with an address and war time stamps on it. Families would treasure the letters from a daughter or son to mother or dad left behind. People used to say, if he or she did not write, they become quickly rich and do not have time to write. Letters of sorrow, sadness, letters of loneliness, letters-reports as promises to write and to keep in touch and to remain going the long-distance relationships. These entire dear to heart and soul letters were saved and treasured. Sometimes, these cherished letters were tied with a silk ribbon and a bow and meant to be read again and again, till the tears were moistened the eyes, and the trough would move to keep the tears away.

A letter of hope and last words of expectations could be found in old bottles that travel the oceans and deep seas, in the most unusual places asking for help, forgiveness, and simply turning the last words of humans to humanity. In a way letters is folklore or perhaps a tradition or ritual that has long-time history.

The role of letters for correspondence has been changed significantly since the 19th century. Today, the internet became the predominate medium for sending letters. The term 'e-mail' meaning electronic mail has entered into everyday speech and communication. Sometimes, the e-mail messages use the formal letter-like format. These days, traditional handwritten letters have given way to digital instrumental communication tools such as emails, chats, tweets, Facebook messages, and texts which are essentially costless and easy to write.

But some elegance and grace remains in the act of putting pen to paper and writing a personal handwritten letter or thank you note, and will always continue to fascinate us. I cannot forget the time when my mother made me sit down at the dining room table and write thank you notes to anyone who'd ever sent me a gift, or did something nice for me. In a way, she was trying to convey me and teach a lesson of importance of acknowledgement when another human being is displaying an act of kindness and generosity. Yes, there is a matter of thank you letters. I was bombarded with letters of hearty congratulations on my fifties jubilee. I was overwhelmed of the much love, faithfulness and affection send in my address from my family members and friends. As I was not able to offer my joy and appreciations in person, I wrote a creative thank you poem to help me more fully express myself.

Many people feel that a casual word of thanks on the telephone or by email is a good enough acknowledgement for a favor, gift, or invitation. A handwritten note is a hundred times more effective and more appreciated than a telephone call. It is not only a permanent record of tanks from the sender, but something that can be passed around and enjoyed by others, too. Sometimes, by making a call, you can intrude at the wrong time that interferes with privacy. As usual, these thank you notes are keeping the language brief and right to the matter and without the hackneyed phrases.

"My dear ...

How are you? I hope you are well. I am sending this letter as a thoroughly message of my thanks and good wishes to you. Please accept my warmest thanks for your kindness.

Always with hearty appreciation, yours Ida." (Signature, 2013)

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"A Thank You Note"
 Let me thank the artist
 Who painted the Earth green
 Let me thank my parents
 Who painted my eyes blue
 Let me thank my husband
 Who was next to me
 When my hair
 Got the silver touch of paint.

Let me thank my children
Who saved me from the dark nights
And brighten up my mornings.
Let me thank my friends
Who introduced me to all colors of rainbow.

The real life is an adventure,
Not as a black and white picture.
It is a palette of colors,
And every day has a mixture of
Shadows, tones, and highlights.
Ida Tomshinsky © 2003

We are totally losing the art of handwriting notes and letters. The cursive writing left my generation appreciates the skill and the craft of it. “Penmanship” was one of the subjects I had to take in elementary school. We often talk about these years with my husband when we would need to bring to school in a small bag a little glass bottle of purple ink to school. Of course the poet would say that the ink spots on paper are utterly lost in the binary codes; and in our days, children growing up and learning to use iPads, computers and other digital gadgets from infancy. I still think that handwriting is a part of our identity as we putting our signature on the most important documents. Unfortunately, to defining a physical object of a “letter” is increasingly out-of-date, old-fashioned, and soon-to-become antique. When was the last time you wrote a letter to someone? For that matter, when was the last time you received a letter from someone? Is it matter at all without over simplify these matters, or sentimentalize?

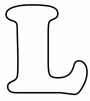
When I was in the Disneyland few years ago, Isat down at the eating court. I noticed a group of Asian girls in straw hats next to me with stack of postcards and Mickey Mouse’s stamps participating in a popular tradition to mail something from a foreign place and enhancing the joy of touching a piece of paper from another part of the world where a friend was thinking of you.

Any type of writing is not an easy process. Our faculty members in academic affairs are teaching students every day to read and write, and create “new information” aka to learn to interpret the information in their own words and to create the “new body of knowledge” which is the most difficult part of any composition and requires originality and is a pure intellectual process with three major essential elements such as talent, judgment, and information. The letter composition reflects on these expressive principles because letters focused on clear ideas, the organizational knowledge, and artistic elegance. First, you have something to say, as usual, nice and pleasant; and second, you say it, with the interior which is matter to you.

While literature and art do not stand in for scientific studies, poems, memoirs, and letters often are essential way to know the world, and ourselves in it. What a wonderful thing is a handwritten letter!

Write me a letter...
Correspondence affair,
Without any fear,
It is a matter
For me and you...
Bring me the blue-ink true!

Write me a letter...
Correspondence affair,
It is blue without you –
Very true, very blue
Cold and lonely without you
Send me a letter or few.
(IT, 2013)



Letter. The letter's most simplified definition is a written or printed communication addressed to a person or business; usually send by post in an envelope. "By nature, a letter is a hybrid," once noticed by Raymond Chandler, an African-American crime writer. Generally, letters are a hybrid of part autobiography, part report, part journal, and part of conversation. In fine penmanship everything is important from paper to language and thoughts. 'A good written letter' may turn it into the art. History of handwriting evolved over a few thousand years, changing to new cultures and adapting to new technologies.

Before writing communication, there was verbal or so called oral communication. Stories and legends were passed from one generation to the next. The word origin comes from Old French *lettre*, from Latin *littera* letter of the alphabet. A letter is not a letter if it is not finishes with final conventional assurances such as *very sincerely yours, yours most sincerely, very respectfully, sincerely yours, respectfully yours*.

From socio-psychological point of view, traditional letters are written messages from one part to another. Historically, handwritten letters on paper or on other materials intended communication between two persons in different locations. Perhaps first letters were the symbols (pictographs) that together with drawings were left in the caves of first humans' settlements. Letters exist from the time of ancient India, ancient Egypt and Sumer in Mesopotamia; from ancient Greece, Rome, and China, up to present day. According to the testimony of ancient historian Hellanicus, the first recorded handwritten letter, *epistle*, was written by Persian Queen Atossa, the daughter of Syrus and mother of Xerxes, around 500 BC.

Three different systems of writing developed in three different cultures within 1200 years of each other. Sumerian cuneiform developed around 3000 BC, Egyptian hieroglyphs around 2800 BC, and the precursor to Kanji Chinese around 1800 BC. The progress of writing allowed documenting historical events, systems of laws, and theories in math, science, medicine; generate literature and more.

Storytelling, song, festivals and initiations are just some of the many ways people of the past tried to preserve their traditions and memories. People marked items as a means of passing information to others, this included markings on stone, indents in clay, by scratching of plates of lead, copper and wood. Historians depend on the written record. Archeologist made available to the world the information wrote by Babylonians astronomical observations on bricks of clay, the Chinese tablets of stone on ancient monuments. There are introductions of characters from nature, fire, water, beasts of the earth and birds of flight, the beginning of the so called Syllabic method of writing – the use of characters to represent sounds.

The Bible books include letters too. Archives of correspondence, whether for personal, diplomatic, or business reasons, serve as primary sources for historians. The New Testament is positively abundant of letters written by St. Paul.

Handwriting is a skill and must be taught. Good handwriting reflects on good thinking, or intelligence. Handwriting is connected to personal identity and good quality of life. A civilized culture requires handwriting.

Today, historian can learn a lot from the lives of average people because those people left behind letters as invaluable evidence of how life was once lived. From the private letters, we can tell what our ancestors ate, how they were dressed, what they dreamed about, what they thought about warfare. Where would Western civilization be without letters?

By the mid-1700's, there were special schools established to teach handwriting techniques, or penmanship. Master penmen would copy official documents such as land deeds, birth and marriage certificates, military commissions, and other legal documents. Timothy Matlack was commissioned to write the final copy of the Declaration of Independence, and Jacob Shallus penned the final copy of the Constitution of the United States of America.

In the America of colonial time, a good handwriting skill became a sign of wealth. Many colonist, women and men, were taught to read, but not to write. Benjamin Franklin founded the Academy of Philadelphia that later became the University of Pennsylvania. Only wealthy men could enter the Franklin's academy who knew how to "write a legible hand."

It was not until the beginning of the 19th century, when public schooling became universal, the handwriting skill was finally taught to American schoolchildren. There are two men who contributed to American identity. Platt Rogers Spencer was “the father of American handwriting.” He was a founder of chain of business schools for “Education For Real Life” to teach so-called Spenserian script of natural forms – trees, leaves, etc. He advised his pupils to practice from six to twelve hours a day to achieve perfectionism. Later in 19th century, A. N. Palmer invented a handwriting format that better served the industrial age. The essential of the Palmer Method included simplified ‘plain and rapid’ handwriting style that was dominated American good handwriting skill since 1912 in every household.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, it was Melvil Dewey and Thomas Edison who developed and perfected the approved ‘library hand’ to be taught in library school and that was widely used in libraries to handle the old-fashion library catalog. The 1903 “Handbook of the New York State Library School” listed the requirements of library hand. They included legibility, speed, and uniformity. In addition, the particular type of ink, inkstands, pens, penholders, and erasers was specified. The standards for lettering were dictated in regards to size, slant, spacing, special letters and figures, and even the proper posture and position of the writer was outlined.

New technology always competed with traditional penned written tradition. Remington sold the first typewriter in 1874, and since the beginning of the 20th century, Americans owned and used typewriters.

As of 2002 or from the beginning of the 21st century, public schools had one computer for every four students; and since this time, the digital revolution evolved, and high school students required to type and to print out their essays.

Meantime, at the current time, Zaner-Bloser handwriting style is one of the main styles of handwriting taught to children in the United States to this days. In the late 1800’s, Charles Zaner founded the Zanerian College of Penmanship, and later sold part interest to Elmer Bloser. Together, they founded the Zaner-Bloser Company and created materials to be used in teaching good penmanship as part of a general education. In 1904, the published the Zaner Method of Arm Movement, developed for children of elementary grade’s age.

A newer method of teaching penmanship was developed in the mid-1970’s by Donald Neal Thurber, called D’Nealian style. It uses to teach slanted letters to teach printing, in order for children to transition more easily to cursive writing. This has also become a popular method taught in United States schools.

Perhaps, not everything is about speed. E-mail is obviously much faster than so-called ‘snail mail.’ Information can be exchanged much more quickly and writing has become a lot more informal as a result. Aesthetics of the art of handwriting skill preserves the artistic aspect and encourage calligraphy as a fine-motor skill beyond old-fashioned art of handwriting nostalgia. Alongside, every handwriting style shaped and contributed to the democratization of the art of handwriting letters.

In 1922, Emily Post summarized letters etiquette for short letters and notes, and also, for longer letters. At the present time, there are massive trail of effective etiquette for writing business letters with emphasis on writing skills and with a purpose for cultural services. A letter is a form of communication or an instrumental tool to affirm existence of a fact or an obligation.

The mail used to be downpour with letters of acceptance with pleasure, apologetic letters for failure and forgiveness, with comfort and deep sympathy of condolences, with sending hearty warm wishes and congratulations, with letters of introduction and invitations, letters of sincerely regrets, and letters of thanks, and even letters with gifts. Imaging this: the entire mail with love, affection, devotion, and more love and with much more affection sent to you, my friend.

According to *History of Handwritten Letters* website at www.handwrittenletters.com handwritten letter prior to 1840 was delivered by courier, coach or horse rider. The receiver of the letter had to pay on its receipt and the cost was dependent on the number of pages and distance travelled. They were sealed using a colored wax with ring or handheld seal to prevent the contents of the letter from being read by others.

In May 1840, Great Britain introduced the first prepaid stamp for the nationwide postal delivery service, with the penny black stamp that featured a portrait of the young Queen Victoria for letters under half an ounce and the two-penny blue stamp for letters over. This was soon followed by other countries introducing similar systems.

Originally, the Royal Mail traces its history back to 1516. King Henry VIII appointed a Master of the Posts, later to become the Postmaster General. The service was first made available to the public by Charles I in 1635. At that time, postage was paid by the recipient, and the General Post Office (GPO) was officially established by Charles II in 1660. The mail underwent substantial reforms when the Uniform Penny Post was introduced in 1840 whereby a single rate for delivery anywhere in the UK was pre-paid by the sender. The penny black stamp was the world's first stamp.

In the United States a limited postal service was introduced in August 1842 followed by a uniformed five-cent charge in 1845 and standardized stamps in 1847.

In the mid-19th century, people had an ink pen, lead pencils, paper, sealed wax stamps, delivery charge-stamps, and later an envelope. Today, a postal service can be private or public, though many governments place restrictions on private systems. But in the mid-19th century national postal systems have generally been established as government monopolies with a fee on a letter or a small package prepaid.

And, of course, we cannot overlook a pen made from a bird's feather, "a writing instrument that dominated for the longest period in history (over one-thousand years)." (Bellis, 2013) The so called quills, the bird's pens, were made from feather material taken from living birds in the spring time and as usual from left bird-wing, as it curved better for the right-handed writers. Goose feathers were most common; swan feathers were of a premium grade and were more expensive. Crow feathers were the best for the fine line, and then came the feathers from eagle, owl, hawk, and turkey.

Historic love letters written by Shakespeare, Keats, Victor Hugo, Napoleon and dozens of other famous men and women continue to stir, motivate and inspire young and old.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), one of history's most famous and mysterious composers died at the age of fifty-seven with one great secret. Upon his death, a love letter was found among his possessions. It was written to an unknown woman who Beethoven simply called his 'immortal beloved.' The world may never put a face with this mysterious woman or know the circumstances of their affair and his romantic letters are all that is left of a love as intensely passionate as the music for which Beethoven became famous. Compositions such as the *Moonlight Sonata* as well as Beethoven's many symphonies express eloquently the tragedy of a relationship never publicly realized.

Epistolary literature has value. Letters of affairs, of all others, are not only the best introductions to the stories about two human lives' communication and fillings, but also are the best introduction to history overall. To a biographer, the letter writing communication is almost indispensable, because in the letters we get as nearer than anywhere else can to a man's inner life and their motives, principles, and intentions. A man will often confess to the friends' ear things that normally life-etiquette and human pride compels them to withhold from public. No questions ask, but the best biographies are the autobiographical that are drawn from letters or conversations. The value is in the thoughts, on how the person felt about events described, about their sufferings and triumphs. Most of all, the value of any letter is a mean of literary culture. According to professor McGregor, a letter enthusiast, "letters are the oldest form of writing, and a key part of literary culture." Jon McGregor advises young people to launch of the so called 'letter page' journal and keep records of love and losses. There are many professors and instructors in academics keeping up with the hope to awake the new trend of the one of the ancient art of encouraging young people to put the pen on paper in the digital world of email and Twitter.

Letters of diplomacy are studied by the university scholars, and letters of famous writers and poets are brilliant pieces of literature. Until 18th century, letter writing was so commonplace that Samuel Richardson composed a novel entitled "Pamela" entirely consisted from letters of a daughter to her parents.

No wonder that many modern time writers use personal letters as the main plot in many modern novels and short stories. I personally know few people that saved the letters written to them by their beloved husbands and wives and, one day, possibly would make a great romantic book or a sentimental movie out of them. A generation ago, in our popular culture were amusing beautiful songs such as "A Soldier's Last Letter," "Please Mr. Postman," "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter," "P.S. I Love You."

Meantime, in 2013 and hundred years later, when letter writing is in decline, we are losing solid writing skills, correct spelling, and the value of words.

In United States, the post offices are downsizing, as the entire business is in turmoil. There are various intentions for post offices to go in different directions. "Through it's been eclipsed by new technologies, there is nothing as valuable or revelatory as a good letter." (Jones, M., January 17, 2009)

There is a new generation with new experiences of traditional mail that brings them only bills and junk mail. Digital natives are constantly chatting and twitting and very little is actually being said. We are substituting human emotions with abbreviations, punctuations, and emoticons. Thanks to the speed, easy access, and general rise of new oral-aural technologies we may text, email, exchange photos and images with casual attitudes and without depth and style, without pausing long enough to reflect. Perhaps in the next decade, "none will hear the postman's knock without a quickening of the heart." (Auden, W. H.)

When I was growing up, letters were pretty much for keeping in touch with family on a distance, and for special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays, but it was not until I left my country and was waiting for the letters from my mom. This personal letters had a true personal impact on me. Physical mail was the connection to the people in the outside world who exist beyond my home-work life. My mother was sending letters in her graceful calligraphic handwriting that could make proud every scholar. I knew without any doubt every moment of my life of what my mother was thinking of me and my family writing these letters. Later, when my daughter went to college, I did the same thing as my mother did, sent letters of love and encouragement to my daughter. It was my turn to purchase stamps and envelopes, and to mail letters, notes, and packages of love and care to my daughter. The package of home-made muffins spoke louder than any email in the world.

Our digital records produced by digital media such as computers, television, camera-phones, spy cams, You Tube, and chat rooms capture every moment of our daily lives. We are overwhelmed with information. We're creating new information, we preserving and backup the data, but the question is: do we have enough information about our thoughts and how we live? By deleting the e-mails, we deleting, first, the tomorrow, and later, the future's pass way for future historians. Only letters bring us the unburied voices, unbuttoned personalities, loosened humor, truthful tenderness of anger on things that matter, and sentimental melancholies. Simply because the words expressions make us human, and letters capture our human thoughts and emotions.

The National Handwriting Day celebrates since January 23, 1977 in United States and on the birthday of John Hancock. On this day the mankind acknowledges the history and influence of penmanship. The commemoration of the holiday includes remembering the American founding father for his iconic signature on the Declaration of Independence. The elegant handwriting emerged as a status symbol, and since 1700s penmanship schools educated generation of master scribes.

"A good handwriting letter is a creative act, and not just because it is a visual and tactical pleasure. It is a deliberate act of exposure, a form of vulnerability, because handwriting opens a window on the soul in a way that cyber communication can never do. You savor their arrival and later take care to place them in a box for safe keeping." (O'Connor, 2012)

The joy of expressing thoughts on paper, posting it, and waiting for the response or the joy of receiving a handed over a letter by the local mailman with a teasing smile are those striking moments that are all worth it.

Today, almost all of our communication and information sources involve complex technologies such as cellular and satellite technology. Information stored and organized as data in databases and arranged in meaningful way. Communication process is made possible by microelectronics that helps us to exchange information from machine to machine, human to machine, from machine to human, and from human to human. Let us see in which category falls the 'lost art of handwriting letters' – my guess is human to human with modern post office technology. Reports about changes in modern technology we receive on annual bases, in monthly magazines and journals, and in daily news. "[Writing code] is the new literacy. In this century if you want to have the power to change the world, writing code is the most practical thing you can do," says Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of reddit and author of the new book "Without their Permission." Perhaps getting a handwriting letter in the digital age of emails and texting makes it more special and more unique. On another hand, "Hugs and kisses, and best wishes," (Tomshinsky, 2003) – are more than kisses, as letters are the "mingle souls." (Donne, Jonne) Any conversation is a catalyst for innovation. And letters are not only a source of permanent news, as usual with some exceptions, they are pages of pleasures. And pleasure is duel for both the person who writes them and person who receives them. Getting a letter in the mail is almost like having a good friend stop by my house for coffee.

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