

Writing a letter

Overview

There are many reasons for writing a letter. It may be, for example, to keep in touch, to express an idea, to make a complaint or to issue an invitation. Letters can be formal or informal and the ways in which you use language and vocabulary will very much depend on the audience and the reason for the letter. If a letter addresses a specific person, it will be written in a style appropriate for that person and it will be immediately clear to them why you are writing it.

Tips for writing a letter

Language – think about:

- **the audience that the letter is for** – for formal letters you will not always exactly know to whom you are writing. If you do not know your reader's name, you can start your letter with 'Dear Sir/Madam' and end your letter with a formal ending such as 'Yours faithfully'.
- **how you expect, or want, your audience to react** – for example, if you are trying to persuade your reader to agree to something you are suggesting, your language should be positive and encouraging in tone.
- **the purpose for the letter** – for example, if you are writing to complain or express a serious opinion you are likely to write more formally. You may use more vivid and expressive language to describe your feelings.
- **how to influence or persuade your reader** – write clearly and calmly and stay in control of your language. Avoid becoming repetitive or dogmatic.

Organisation:

- **Plan a route through your letter before you start writing it** – the structure of a formal letter is usually in three parts after the initial greeting. For example:
 1. **the opening paragraph** – outline the aim of the letter and make it clear why you are writing. Give brief details about yourself if appropriate.
 2. **a middle** – explain and develop your points making sure they are relevant to the purpose of the letter. Include any details that are necessary for the reader, for example date and time of meeting, subject of talk to be given.
 3. **an end** – summarise the main points you want your reader to remember, or the action now required.
- **Use a conventional structure** – start with a greeting such as 'Dear ...'. and end your letter with a standard phrase such as 'Yours faithfully or sincerely' (depending on the level of formality).
- **Use linking words and phrases** – for example, you could use 'furthermore', 'however', 'in conclusion' to link ideas in sentences and paragraphs.
- **Make any timescales involved clear to your reader** – it is important that the reader knows exactly what is expected of them and when.

Example of a letter

	Comments
<p>Dear Mrs Allen,</p> <p>I am writing in response to your request for pupils to give you their opinion on the idea of getting rid of homework.</p> <p>Overall, I think this is an excellent suggestion. Every day I spend hours doing homework that can be repetitive and without real purpose. If your plan became reality, I would be able to spend my time much more profitably, being physically active after sitting all day in school, or just reading a book for pleasure.</p> <p>I realise of course that the point of homework is to reinforce the learning that has taken place in class but with careful planning, all of the syllabus could be covered in school. Pupils should be encouraged to pay more attention in class so that they learn everything that they need to know.</p> <p>Furthermore, if teachers made the lessons more varied and used films, games and the internet, pupils would be more engaged, and the discussions would be really stimulating. In this way, learning would be fun and there would be no need for homework.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p> <p>Full Name</p>	<p>The learner uses the name of the person they are writing to since they know this person who is the Headteacher of the school and they are writing about a matter related to the school.</p> <p>The learner introduces the topic in this opening paragraph.</p> <p>The learner is polite and calm and makes their point clearly.</p> <p>The candidate uses a range of appropriate linking words to connect their points, e.g. 'overall', 'of course', 'furthermore', 'in this way'.</p> <p>The language is calm and rational and there is a sense of purpose and audience.</p> <p>The learner uses an appropriate sign off.</p>