



How to Write a Letter for *Letters to Strangers*: A Guide

Hi! Thank you for your interest in writing a letter. Please **first read our [letter-writing overview](#)** and [sample letters](#) to get a feel for what we look for in our letter submissions, then come back and read this guideline. Ultimately, the idea of writing a letter is to let your heart rest. Let it breathe; let it run wild; let it bleed into ink. So if you need to be a bit unorthodox for that to happen, the risk may be worth taking. Just keep in mind that this is a two-way street, and for the reader to respect your words, you must also **respect** the infinitude that defines their possible experiences. So **no hate speech, harassment, and/or other presentations that carry similarly volatile connotations**, please! :) We prefer handwritten letters, but you may also [submit your letter digitally](#) if you need to. So when you're done writing your letter, give it to your chapter/partner site head (don't have one? [Start a chapter/partner site](#) yourself!) or [submit it online](#).

Questions? [Contact us](#).

Guidelines for Writing a Letter:

- 1. Begin your letter addressing a stranger and, if you sign it off, do so as a stranger.** The most common way is “Dear Stranger” and “Love, a stranger.” **Do not share personally-identifiable information** (name, location, workplace, etc.).
- 2. Remember: you don’t know the reality of the person reading your letter. So write with the golden rule in mind.** If you wouldn’t want to read what you wrote, then chances are, a stranger wouldn’t, either. (*That includes avoiding **derogatory and swear words**, which you can [learn more about here](#) under the section “Can you give me some guidelines for indecent language?”*)
- 3. Speak in the “I.” Don’t assume, accuse, or make generalizations,** such as with advice. You don’t know the person reading your letter, after all! :) This includes things like saying “you will *always* have *everyone* rooting for you,” because sometimes a person’s trauma is because of abuse by someone else, and seeing such a phrase can feel hollow or too bubbly/assumptive.
- 4. Similar to above, but: it is okay to be personal.** However, stay **personal with just yourself**. This is not a pen pals system, so you will not hear back from the stranger who read your letter. In other words, this is not a conversation that requires them to respond to you for its meaning to be felt. However, you may be tempted to ask them questions anyway. That’s totally okay! If what you want to ask them is a very personal piece of information, however, think carefully about the question first. It’s okay to talk about your experience with a horrible break-up, for example, but it may not be in your best interest to demand “how can anyone be so cruel as to break up with someone?”
- 5. Share information, but avoid condescension. Share experiences, but avoid blatant self-promotion.** If you happen to know some interesting facts, do share! Excitement can be contagious. But consider the way you phrase it. Rather than “Come on, you’d be crazy to not know about [insert fact],” try “I found out yesterday that [insert fact], and it honestly blew me away!”. Similarly, do recount experiences that are meaningful to you, but don’t use them to turn your letter into a resume.
- 6. Avoid pushing your beliefs.** This is similar to #3, but it’s worth reiterating. You may believe that someone with a certain illness just needs to take the same medicine that your relative with the same illness took to get better, or maybe you personally think your own experience with illness was *beneficial* for one reason or another. However, because you won’t know the reality of the person reading your letter, it is better to not insist on your ultimate correctness. This goes for a variety of things, from politics to religion to perception of diagnoses. You are more than

encouraged to share the things that truly matter to you - just remember that *other* things may matter just as much to your reader; there's no single "right" way to live.

7. **Empathy and compassion are key.** Try to connect with your fellow human being by choosing **love as a default**. That is, **do offer support when relevant** ("If you feel lost, too, know my spirit is with you. You matter. You matter to me.") and **trust** them with **genuineness**. **Write like you know/acknowledge there is a reader.**
8. Speaking of which...**Write like your reader is a friend. Write while envisioning good intentions where possible.** Instead of writing as if someone who has hurt you will read your letter, write like you're talking to someone who understands you and would not judge you. This will help make the letter-writing process **cathartic and real rather than chore-esque**.
9. **Don't be afraid to be vulnerable**, include **keywords** for potential **triggers** at the top of your letter or in tags on our online platform, and **avoid active harm**. What is in the letter stays in the letter. Readers can't share with others personal details, so don't let fear of judgment stop you from telling your story. If you are actively considering harm to yourself or others, though instead of writing it in a letter, please contact a professional as soon as possible. You can [find some resources here](https://www.letterstostrangers.org/find-support) (<https://www.letterstostrangers.org/find-support>). Any suggestions of active harm will require our moderators to serve as mandated reporters and work with you to notify professional and/or emergency personnel as legally required.
10. Furthermore, like how you wouldn't want to watch a movie that ends in the middle of the climax, make sure you have some sort of **resolution** in your letter. It doesn't have to be happily ever after, but do share tips and people and experiences that have been helpful for you. Small things count!
11. **Stay creative!** You don't have to write an essay or be a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for your letter to matter. You just need to **write as who you are**. People have drawn pictures and even folded origami in the past, so you are in charge. However, if you choose to take an artistic approach, do try to write some words to ground things in.
12. **Practice makes perfect. Talk the talk, then walk the walk.** Commit yourself to the principles behind these letters: **empathy, connection, growth, love, and vulnerability**. Make sure that when you write, the stories you share are **consistent with these values** - we all make mistakes, so don't worry about perfection. But if you share experiences that are clearly against these values and don't acknowledge that or how you might grow/learn, we'll probably have to "reject".

Rules are made to be broken, but these guidelines are important to keep the L2S community an inclusive one for everybody. Thank you for reading, and *happy letter-writing!*