

## LETTERS TO STRANGERS: *SAMPLE LETTERS*

**Hi!** Thank you for wanting to write a letter. We have a collection of five letters here that we hope will get your creative juices flowing, but please don't feel constrained to them! We've had people draw, paint--even fold origami!--instead of write words. The important thing is that you put your heart into it. Length doesn't matter; authenticity does. So with that in mind, enjoy, and write on!

(And it goes without saying, but these were all letters once submitted by members of Letters to Strangers. Please respect their truths. These letters are only for viewing.)

## SAMPLE LETTER #1

Dear Stranger,

And you *are* dear, so very dear. I write this during winter break, nestled in a slowly rocking vessel. The small boat's hull cradles my back and the gentle sway of the worn wood around me weighs on my eyelids, casting a dreamy sleep into my bones. A foghorn somewhere off in the distance melds with the low mournful calls of water birds in a drifting nautical lullaby.

This night I saw a crane. First, just as a figment, a stalking shade across the dewy boardwalk in the inky blackness. Then, as long legs led a gracefully bobbing head into the shallow spotlights thrown over the shoulders of haphazard lamp poles, the bird made itself known to me. The night fell over the two of us, heavy and profound, and the crane moved as a placid current, smooth and unceasing: inevitable grace and inexorable tranquility. I followed it, and in that forest of masts, reaching into the void of velvet midnight in the sky above, there was not a single other being, it seemed, in existence. In our own silence, and in the silence found only at sea, sound swallowed by the blankets of water, vast on every side, everything was clear. I was at the mercy of that strong beak, those sure feet. The bird had a superiority of stature that communicated, soundless though it was, that the crane was my teacher, and I its student. As we walked that still boardwalk, the world expanded in crystal clarity around me. A calm rested deeply upon my chest, for I had seemed to accept the singularity that moment, and of all moments. Life made a kind of quiet sense. Then those thin, elegant legs came to a stop. The bird turned to the water, stretching its neck, a longing reach for the waves, the silhouette of a dancer's leg, lengthening down to the delicate point of the toe. In a single fluid movement, it spread its wings and lifted off my plane of reality, slipping with ease back into the shadows from which it had emerged. The moment passed. Life went on. The transient knowledge that had once lifted my muscles with the peace of acceptance drifted on the subtle breeze, now just a memory, leaving me a simple mortal once more.

I heard about a bicycle accident that took the life of a Claremont man. This morning, there was a human being, with breath in his lungs and vitality coursing through his veins. By the afternoon, there was not. He presumably had a spouse, perhaps some kids. Maybe he was going to dinner that evening. These would seem trivial things, except for the fact that their perceiver could no longer enjoy them. It too often takes loss to awaken the living to the beauty of what once was.

Bearing both in mind, laying the two events of seemingly separate worlds over each other, I see the importance of the crane. In a moment, entire lifetimes can be brought bursting forth, or, just as likely, they can be torn away from existence entirely. Because of this, we must cherish the moments in between.

Take the time to notice the profundity of the crane, dear stranger. Let simple moments touch your heart, for they are all fleeting.

Love,  
A Stranger

## SAMPLE LETTER #2

Dear Stranger,

I read somewhere once that one of the best predictors of a long life is resilience under stress. Scientists determined that based on a multitude of factors, some people do better than others in stressful situations, and those people tend to live longer. This news didn't seem that great to me, because practically everyone in my family seems to suffer from some kind of stress disorder. My brother actually has clinically diagnosed OCD, my dad is one of the most paranoid people you'll ever meet, and my mom is the type to be crippled by perfectionism. Despite these things, we don't act too dysfunctional, but stress is ever present and while it might not hurt us too badly, it certainly doesn't help.

For a long time I was stressed too. I probably still don't handle stress as well as I could, but at some point I realized that my stress level doesn't have to be proportional to the amount of stressful things occurring in my life. In fact, I realized that even under extremely stressful situations, I actually did not have to necessarily feel any anxiety or distress. While these stressful situations provide something to be stressed about, I realized that, for me at least, engaging with the stress was a choice. Allowing stressful situations to affect my disposition and outlook disproportionately was also a choice.

Around this time I became interested in meditation. The idea behind meditation is that often, if you can step back from your thoughts enough, you can get a better idea of the big picture. Your stressful environment will still be there, but you might realize that your reaction to the stress was disproportionate, unproductive or (as I often find for myself) irrational. I've found that anxiety is almost always irrational.

Last year I read a book that really culminated all of these ideas: Meditations by Marcus Aurelius. Meditations isn't really a book, but rather a collection of private thoughts and notes Aurelius wrote to himself with no audience in mind. Aurelius was a stoic and interestingly, despite being a roman, his philosophy reminded me quite a lot of what I knew about eastern philosophy. One of my favorite quotes from the book reads: "If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment." I think we can all approach tough moments like a Roman emperor--stoic and fearless.

Have a good one,


Your friendly neighborhood spiderman.

## SAMPLE LETTER #3

10/23/14

Dear stranger,

✿ Sometimes, in a moment of solid, quiet exhaustion, I  
✿ have this longing deep in my chest. I want nothing  
✿ more than to sit in a temperate field, soft sun alighting  
✿ on the thin stalks of grass and melowing through  
✿ my bones. I just want that simplicity back. I want to  
✿ sprawl on a bonnie green hill and make daisy chains  
✿ till my fingers are stained with their pigment. I want  
✿ to be able to breath again— fresh air to expel the stale  
✿ from my lungs.

 I want to crawl back under the covers, the need so  
painful as I forge my way through the halls. I miss  
the slow breathing, the pillowing, billowing sanctity of  
mornings before duty and before wakefulness. Sometimes  
I just need some arms around me. Some gentle affection.  
The world that opens before me the moment my bare feet  
touch the cold floor can be so cruel.



There's something so homeopathic, so comforting about a  
mug of tea. I can feel it seeping down my throat,  
filling my belly with liquid coziness. Ease spreads  
through my veins. Peace in a cup! What perfect  
sanctuary!

These are my desires, stranger. What are we without something  
to cling to?

Love,  
A stranger

## SAMPLE LETTER #4

Dear Stranger,

Being a student is a lot, sometimes, and something I often lose sight of in the shuffle is how beautiful it is, inside and out. I mean, when I look around me... Do I remember what it was like when I first set foot on campus? Even in the fluster of arrival, of trying to see everything at once, and not really seeing anything, there was magic in the air. Now that the campus is familiar, it's far too easy to walk quickly, with my eyes on the pavement, not the beauty around me; but don't, I remind myself. Take a moment, and stand still. Breathe in the air -- and having grown up in a big city, now that I'm somewhere more rural, I can tell you that the air is both good and clean especially in the winter, when its coldness pricks at the top of your mouth.

If you ever get up early in the morning, stand at the edge of a field at sunrise if you can. The best thing about being there is how still it is: it feels like the whole world has dropped away, and there's only you and the bright, golden, morning sunlight. When it's warm, lie on your back on the field at night, and look up at the stars. If you're not in a big city, on a clear night, you can always see the stars. Look up at the stars sometimes, if you're worried. They don't know if you're anxious or sad or scared, and that's a good thing. The stars are, shining in their cold, remote way, a reminder of how small we are, and that all our worries will pass. If you're ever feeling sad, just raise your eyes: stop moving, and really look around you. Look at everything -- the stars, the trees, the halls -- as if you were seeing it for the first time. I guarantee you that if you slow down and look, you'll feel better, because there are more good and lovely things in the world than you can possibly know: and if you look carefully, you are bound to see at least some of them.

Good luck! Be steady, be strong, and know that in the end, I'm here beside you, a stranger in passing - and I'm rooting for you.

Love,

A Stranger

## SAMPLE LETTER #5

3/12/15

Dear stranger,

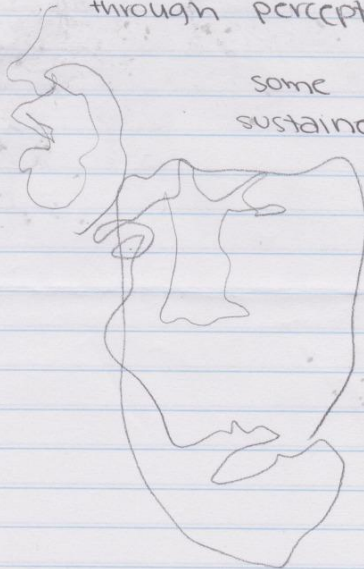
Here are some blind contours — drawings done without lifting the pencil or looking at the page.



I think it's interesting how faces become abstracted through perception.



some characteristics are sustained, but many are lost to artistic license.



Every passing figure is contorted in memory.



Love,  
A stranger