

Write an Informal Letter

An informal letter or a personal letter is a letter to a close friend or an acquaintance. Isn't it wonderful to receive such a letter from a friend? Better yet, isn't it wonderful to actually write one?

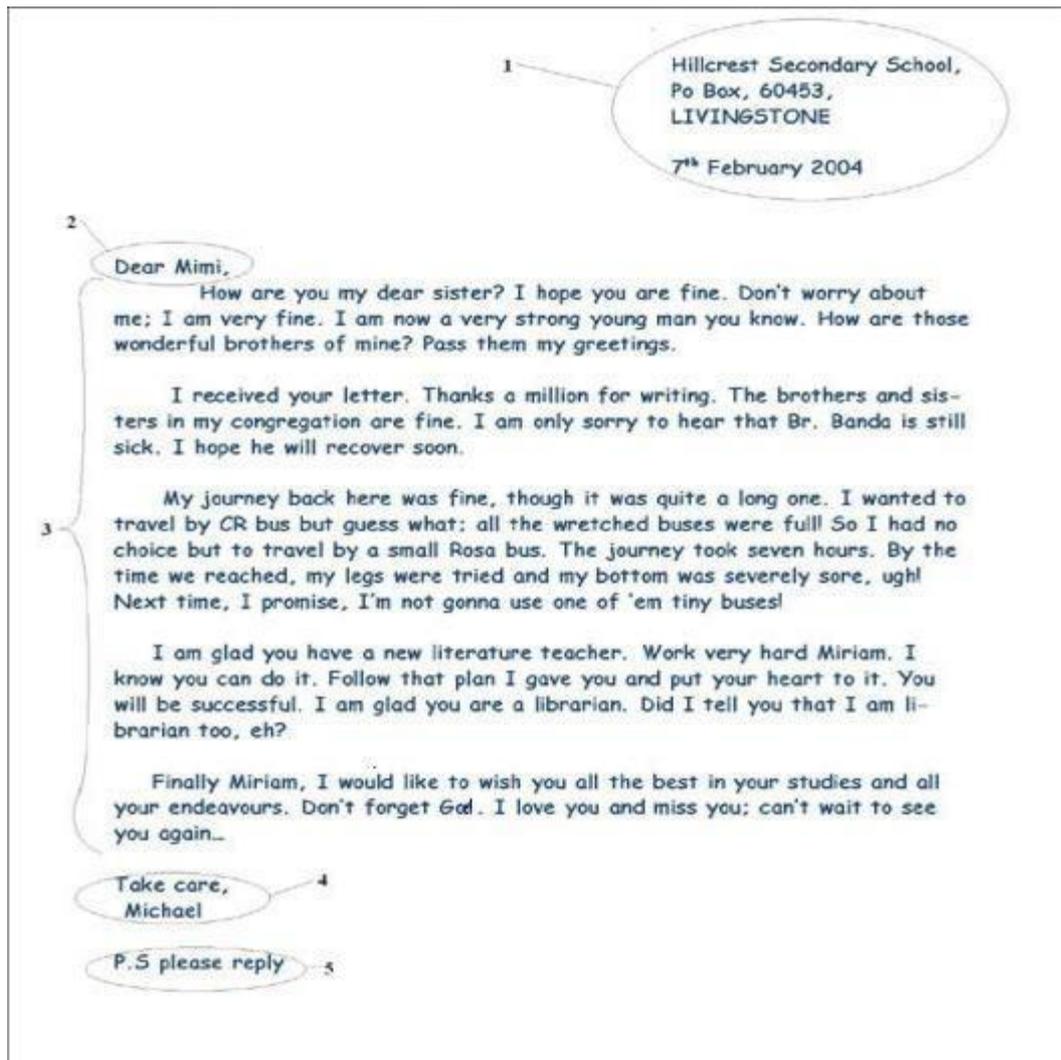
If you think letter writing is lame or old fashioned, read this article first: [Letter writing](#)

Letter writing still has a sentimentality about it that transcends all other forms of communication, and this is probably why some people stick to it even though they could use other means.

The best way of learning how to write letters, I reckon, is to look at a number of specimens, analyse what has to be done and perhaps what does not have to be done, don't you agree?

Of course there are no hard and fast rules about how to write an informal letter and common sense dictates that someone may use whatever works best for him. However, there is a conventional way of going about it that will make all the difference if you apply it.

Let's start off by reviewing a letter I wrote to my sister some four years ago:



Informal Sample Letter #1

1. Address and date

Some people may think the address is not important in an informal letter and prefer to leave it out. That works well if the person you are writing to knows your address already or if she has a good memory! However, it is very unlikely that someone will always remember your address, so it is always a good idea to include it. Remember, this is the address they have to write to for the letter to reach you. The recipient's address is on the envelope.

The address and date should be in the right hand corner. If I were writing to a person in another country, I would have preferred to add the following details:

Hillcrest Secondary School,

P.O Box 60453,

Livingstone,

ZAMBIA

10101

7th February 2004

Since she already lives in Zambia, it is not necessary to include the country and the postcode i.e. 10101. However, if you are writing to someone outside the country, always include your country and post code.

After you have written the address, leave a line and write the date.

2. **Salutation**

The most common salutation in an informal letter is “Dear....”

Note that it is followed by a comma.

Dear Mimi,

However, some go extremely informal and use “Hey!” or “Hi!”

You should use your discretion. Obviously if you are writing to your father, you would not use “Hey!” unless of course you are extremely close.

3. **Body**

Here are a few things you should take note of:

- **Paragraphs:**

Since informal letters are usually written by hand, the paragraphs are usually indented. However, with more

people using their computers to do most of their writing (and I have a bad feeling most people will forget how to write with their hands), it is becoming a common practice to write paragraphs without indentations—like the way this one is written. This, apparently, is the modern way of writing paragraphs.

- **use informal language**

The first paragraph generally expresses a greeting, followed by wishes of good health. Remember you are writing to someone you know very well, so try to be as friendly as possible:

How are you my dear sister?

However, always use your discretion. Try not to go overboard. Some people become bold and daring in letters and write things that they would otherwise not say to the person face to face. Obviously if you are writing to an adult that you respect, like your dad, try not to write things like:

“What’s up dude!” or “What’s going down?”

Try to picture the person you are writing to standing in front of you. Imagine the things that you would say to him and write them down. This will help you not to go overboard.

Also avoid boring sentences like...

“I am writing this letter to....”

...unless you are writing to a stranger. Even so, try to be as amiable as possible:

I have heard so much about you and would be head over heels with joy if you could agree to be my pen pal

Try to be as conversational as possible. You are allowed to use colloquial language – i.e. language that is appropriate for speech but not really for writing:

My journey back here was fine, though it was quite a long one. I wanted to travel by CR bus but guess what; all the wretched buses were full! So I had no choice but to travel by a small Rosa

bus. The journey took seven hours. By the time we reached, my legs were tired and my bottom was severely sore, ugh! Next time, I promise, I'm not gonna use one of 'em tiny buses!

However informal you get, you should not forget to pay attention to...

- **punctuation and spelling**

I have come across a good number of letters that abound with spelling mistakes and awful punctuation. Such mistakes tend to distract the reader, so don't neglect them even though you know your friend will understand.

The quality of your letter also speaks volumes about the kind of person you are so all the more reason to be careful!

If you use **contractions**, make sure that you put the apostrophe in the right places. For example:

Isn't and not *is'nt*

won't and not *wont*

mustn't and not *must'nt*

The contraction *it's* is especially one that you must watch out for. It is the short form of *it is* or *it has*. But if you want to use *it* to indicate possession, you should use *its* and not *it's*. Check out this example:

The dog lost its collar.

Remember also to use capitals for the right things i.e. the names of people, places, holidays, etc should all start with a capital letter.

Bottom line? Don't throw away your grammar book!

- **Use consistence voice and style**

Use the active voice if you want your letter to sound more conversational and interesting. Avoid shifts in the voice. Check out this article on the advantage of using the active voice: [Use active Voice](#)

One common error is inconsistency in the tense. For example read the following sentence:

I was going to town yesterday when a dog bite me and I ran all the way to the hospital.

Here is a sentence with starts in the past tense and then right in the middle, the tense changes to present and then finally reverts to past. Even if your friend is very understanding, this is still distracting.

- **Ask questions**

It is always a good idea to ask questions in the body of the letter that you would like the person to answer in their reply. Questions work as a good base on which to write a letter, and they give the recipient motivation to reply:

How are those wonderful brothers of mine?

Did I tell you that I am librarian too, eh?