

**HOW TO
BE THE
PERFECT
PEN PAL
FROM
THE
OLD VIC**

INTRODUCTION



So, you've been given your very own pen pal. That's great.

This is your opportunity to meet someone new and tell them all about yourself.

Sometimes it can be hard to know where to start with writing a letter, but once you begin you'll be an expert in no time, and this guide will help you be the best pen pal you can be.

We've included all sorts of tips and tricks to help you get started, including some creative challenges and sentence suggestions. Make sure you've got your pen and paper, and let's get going.



Did you know

Before pens were invented, people wrote with sharpened bones or sticks, or feathers dipped in ink? Maybe don't try this at home...

What is a pen pal?

To put it simply, a pen pal is someone you write letters or emails to. Maybe they are someone you met on holiday and want to keep in touch with, or maybe they are a distant family member you want to get to know.

Or, they could be a complete stranger, like the person you have been matched with. This is an exciting opportunity to get to know someone completely new. Who knows, you could make a friend for life.

Letters

People have been writing letters to each other for thousands of years, with the earliest recorded letter sent in 500 BC by a Persian Queen. That's a whopping 2,520 years ago. Since then, letters have been sent for all sorts of reasons, such as:

- To tell people important information, such as from the government or from royalty
- To keep in touch with loved ones such as friends, family or partners
- To practice their handwriting or writing skills

You may be writing a physical letter to your pen pal or writing an email to them, but these tips will come in handy whatever form your letter takes. What's important is what you put in your letter.

But where to begin?

The first thing you have to think about when writing your letter is how to start it. Most letters begin with a salutation (which is a fancy word for 'hello'). A salutation is how you let your pen pal know this letter is specially for them and is made up of two parts: the greeting and the person's name.

The most common letter greeting is 'dear', for example 'Dear Marie', or 'Dear Abdi'. This is a great way to begin your salutation, as it is the way most letters begin.

The second part of the salutation is your pen pals name. Don't worry if you don't know your pen pals name yet, just be sure to ask their name in your first letter. You could open your letter with 'Dear Friend' or 'Dear Pen Pal' if you do not yet know your pen pals name.

Great. Now you've added a greeting to your pen pal letter it's time to get writing.



Writing your letter

Now it's time to write the body of the letter. This doesn't mean the letter has to have arms and legs. The body is the name for the main bulk of the letter. This is also the fun bit but it can be the hardest bit as there's lots to think about, such as the three W's:

Who: Who am I sending the letter to? How old are they?

What: What do I want to say? What questions do I want to ask? What do I want to tell them? What would I find interesting to read?

Where: Where does my pen pal live? Do they live in a different country to me?

These are important questions to consider before writing your letter, as this will help you make a letter special to your pen pal. You could even write your own answers to these questions before starting your letter.

Now you've thought about these questions, here are some do's and don'ts about writing the body of your letter.

Do's and Don'ts

Do ask questions about your pen pal, for example:

- What is your favourite meal?
- What do you like to read?

- Do you have any pets?
- What are your hobbies/interests?

Don't ask them any personal questions though, for example their address or their last name, and don't share these details with your pen pal. It's important to stay safe.

Do tell your pen pal about your interests and hobbies. Do you have a particular hobby you love to do? Do you know a lot about zoo animals? Share this with your pen pal. This is a great way to get to know each other.

Don't be afraid to talk about what's going on in the world at the moment. It is an unusual time for everyone, and it can be good to share how you feel with someone who understands.

Do show your personality. Everyone is different, so show this in your letter. You can even include drawings or illustrations if you like.

Don't forget to check out the Creative Challenges set by us to help you write your letter.

However, this is your letter and these are just suggestions of what to include. If you want to write about one thing for the whole letter, then go ahead.

This is your chance to show your personality and share your passions with your pen pal.

EXAMPLE SENTENCES

Here's some prompt sentences for you if you're really stuck.

You can include some of these in your letter to help you get started but remember to change them so they are about you.

My name is _____. I am _____ years old and I live in London. What's your name?

My favourite lesson at school is (or was) _____. I enjoy(ed) learning about _____.

I have 1 brother and 1 sister. They are called _____ and _____. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

My favourite book I have ever read is _____.

I like this book because _____.
Do you like reading?

My favourite thing to do at the weekend is _____. What do you do in your spare time?

When I grow up I want to be _____.
(When I was at school I wanted to be _____)

My favourite kind of weather is _____ because _____. What is the weather like where you live?



Creative Challenge

Find out an interesting fact about the city or town you live in and share this with your pen pal. You could even draw them an illustration (a picture) of your favourite place to visit.

Finishing your letter

Once you have written your letter, it's time to write your ending.

This is the last thing your pen pal will read, so make sure you sign off with something nice. For example, you could **thank your pen pal** for reading your letter, or you could tell them **you look forward to hearing from them**. Whatever you do, make sure you end your letter on a positive note.

Now all that's left is to sign off. There are many different ways to sign off a letter, for example 'best wishes' or 'kind regards' or just simply 'from'. And don't forget to put your name.

And that's it.

Hopefully this guide has helped you get your letter off the ground and given you some ideas of how to write your letter. Maybe you've even written your letter or email ready to send off to your pen pal. That's great. Once you've got your letter ready to go, the hard part is over and all that's left is to wait for their response and get to know your pen pal.

Lastly, the great thing about letters is even a letter that is one sentence long is still a letter, so don't worry, everyone's letters will be different and the most important thing is to show your personality and have fun.

**Congratulations,
you're now a pen pal.**

Next Steps:

- Now you've completed this guide, why not check out the expert guide for more writing challenges and tips?
- Get some letter writing inspiration from the example letters we've included below, written by pen pals just like you.



Creative Challenge

Write a postcard from your favourite holiday or daytrip to your pen pal. As postcards are small, think about the really important things you want to mention.

EXAMPLE LETTERS

FROM Community Member
TO Student



Nice to meet you. I hope you are enjoying the summer holidays in these strange times. I am doing a lot of gardening, as I can't go to the theatre, which I love. Below is my postcard. I look forward to hearing from you.

I am sending you this postcard from St Marks Square in Venice. I love London, but Venice is definitely number two.

From here I can see the Basilica, Cloc Tower and The Doges Palace. What I love the most are the tiny back streets with their little bridges as this gives you a taste of how the local people live. Maybe it's the canals leading to the numerous squares, called campi in Italian, but Venice is a very magical city.



FROM Community Member
TO Student



Thank you for your email and postcard. I haven't been to Venice so I have looked up online the places you were talking about. I think the inside of the Doge's Palace looks very grand and intricately decorated. One day I would like to visit the city and see all the waterways for myself.

This summer I have spent time at the beach with my family. We have been building dams, looking in rock-pools and playing with our two dogs. I have drawn a picture of the beach to show you. I have one younger brother and one twin brother, who really enjoy swimming in the sea, I thought the water was freezing. I am looking forward to hearing from you again soon x



Education & Community

Education & Community Director

Hannah Fosker*

Education Manager

Euan Borland*

Young Person's Programme Manager

Naomi McKenna Lawson*

Education & Community Coordinator

Kate Lawrence-Lunniss*

Education & Community Intern

Abena Obeng

Student Placement

Hannah Margerison

Photography

Manuel Harlan

*The Old Vic staff

The Old Vic

The Cut

London SE1 8NB

+44 (0) 20 7928 2651

oldvictheatre.com

© The Old Vic, 2020

E education@oldvictheatre.com

T [@oldvictheatre](https://twitter.com/oldvictheatre)

**OV Pen Pals is generously supported by
PwC and the Worshipful Company of Grocers**
