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## Love Letters: A Style and Usage Guide

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Writing is my favorite form of communication—a trait that I once thought made me unique. However, it turns out that among the population of creative writing majors, I'm not alone. I've witnessed quite the number of my fellow students admit to feeling more comfortable within written expression rather than spoken. But sometimes I doubt my fellow students' allegiance to written communication: despite supposedly preferring to write rather than speak, they all seem willing to engage in romantic relationships within which—as far as I can tell—spoken communication is the primary mode of expression. Personally, I find this appalling.

For me romantic interaction is all about two things: the pen and the paper. Others seem to care about the exchange of saliva and God knows what other bodily fluids, but what I'm into is the exchange of big, leafy written documents. Give me some fervent written correspondence, the occasional hello, and lots of awkward eye-contact, and I'm a Happy Ryan. And really my life hasn't been as romantically dismal as you might expect: I've duped many the fine lass into becoming what was once later termed "glorified pen-pals" (her nomenclature, not mine). As such, I've become quite the authority on the art of writing a love letter.

What most people don't realize about writing a love letter is that it's a process that is just as much about structure as it is about passion—in fact, I'd argue that structure is *more* important than passion: passion comes and goes, but there's no excuse for a lack of structure. A well-formed love letter will always be read even if it is lacking in passion, but even the most passionate love letter will find a hostile audience if it is so structurally jumbled that it winds up looking more like a psychoanalytic inkblot rather than an attempt at verbal communication. Therefore, I present to you a simple, easy-to-use Love Letter Usage Guide. Simply consult this document before writing any love letter, and whether you're only an aspiring novice or you're a grizzled love-letter veteran, this guide will help you introduce your reader to a whole new textual representation of yourself.

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## SUGGESTED FORMAT

There are four widely accepted guidelines when it comes to proper love letter format:

- A. Write the damned thing out (in pen on paper).
- B. Write the damned thing out (in pen on paper).
- C. Remember: not even the most affectionate machines send each other electronic love letters.
- D. Write the damned thing out (in pen on paper).

It's also important that the letter be hand-delivered. However, avoid all unnecessary cleverness while doing so: do not slip your love letter into your reader's coat-pocket while they sleep, do not leave it in their primary journal (as if you would date anyone with only *one* journal) for them to find later, do not dictate it to their talkative parakeet, and never let anyone but you deliver it. Simply approach them and present the love letter, thus initiating the following exchange:

**Reader:** Is that letter for me?

**You:** Perhaps.

**Reader:** May I have it?

**You:** What're the magic words?

**Reader:** Suppurate Motel.

**You:** Enjoy.

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The magic words business is meant to confirm that your reader is who they claim to be, a precautionary measure so self-evidently necessary that it will be granted no further explanation here.

## THOSE THREE SIMPLE WORDS

It's optimal here to never trust your gut. Never write *I Love You* unless you're certain that you don't mean it.<sup>1</sup> This will keep your reader on their toes and your prose fresh.

**Improper usage:** "You know that time we shared a sidelong glance while perusing separate volumes of the OED? I kissed you then... like, in my mind. It was hot. I love you."

**Proper usage:** "Halfway through the meal I decided that although I am an ardent fan of puns, they make for poor eating utensils. I love you. And then I swapped my spork for something less clever."

However, don't fret if you find yourself unable to resist writing *I Love You* at times that you might actually mean it: these sorts of mistakes tend to get sifted out during the third or fourth draft.

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<sup>1</sup> The only exception to this rule applies to *I Love How You...* statements. Since these statements are not a direct assertion of love for your reader but rather a description of the reader's traits which you find favorable, feel free to use *I love How You...* statements with as much flair and frequency as desired. However, don't forget that artistry and craft come first: never fall into cliché or sentimentality. For example: "I love how you can sneeze without breaking eye contact" is bad. It is too precise and lacks smarminess. However, "I love how you never violate my personal space" is good, and "I love how you feign ignorance of certain adorable linguistic nonfluencies within your speech patterns" is even better.

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## ARCANE VOCABULARY

Use it! Nothing conveys true affection like words that your reader would have no practical reason to be familiar with.

**Proper usage:** “I suspect that this new hairstyle you’ve chosen will turn out to be Brahmasphutasiddhantaesque in nature (w/r/t the text’s treatment of zero specifically): seemingly reasonable and necessary during the era of its formation, but later only useful in the negative as a learning experience. I love you.”

**Improper usage:** Anything involving a Klingon.

## ENGAGING THE SENSES

Like any other kind of writing, the best way to engage your audience within your work is by playing to their senses. However, you’ll want to avoid sensory details rooted in romantic clichés. That means no red roses, no flowers of any kind, no cute allusions to the heart (toss all that ‘my right ventricle empties in tune for you’ stuff out the window right now), nothing is ever velvet or silk, no flower-petals of any kind—in fact, hardly any vegetation of any kind—nothing stuffed unless it actually exists (i.e., do not call your reader Teddy Bear—call your teddy bear Teddy Bear) and if you go the olfactory route, avoid ‘sweet,’ ‘cinnamon,’ ‘lemon,’ ‘lavender,’ and etc. etc. In general, you’d probably be better off avoiding anything visual, tactile, or gustatory so long as you want to avoid sounding overwrought. Therefore, only use words that are olfactory or audible in nature.



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**Improper usage:** "Did I ever tell you that I love how green your eyes are? Not even the wettest mucus could top that particular shade, baby."

**Proper usage:** "I think of you whenever I catch a whiff of a nearly-dead person at the nursing home, because that smell reminds me both to love those old farts even more since they're about to croak, but also to not get too attached since they're about to croak. It's a mix of selfless love and emotional self-preservation—like with you and me. Because we might break up. Or croak."

## WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW

Any good reader will be able to tell if you start writing out your ear, so stick to writing only about what you know. However, if you find yourself wanting to write about something you don't know, simply use this simple, four-step heuristic:

- 1.) Pick a topic you want to write about.
- 2.) Determine whether you know anything about this topic. If you do, proceed to step 4. If you don't, proceed to step 3.
- 3.) Repeat aloud the following: "I know that I know absolutely nothing about my chosen topic." You now know something about the topic. Proceed to step 4.
- 4.) Write about this topic.

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**Improper application of the heuristic:** “I want to say that I love you, but I’m just not sure that I know what love is yet. I’m so sorry.”

**Proper application of the heuristic:** “I know for certain that I haven’t the foggiest idea what love is, and so therefore I can say with confidence that I love you... whatever that means.”

## THE BLANK SLATE

Use only when seeking relationship-termination. Consists of handing the reader a letter that is revealed to be blank upon unfolding. To be used with caution. Highly traumatic. Sometimes fatal. Use only in extreme cases. 100% relationship-termination success rate. Intrinsic ethical value hotly debated by numerous academics. Has resulted in a complete reversal of all romantic-tendencies in at least one documented case: Subject gave up on art of love-letter writing entirely. Proceeded to engage in mouth/ear romantic interaction thereupon. Subject cited shock associated with discovering the one he/she cared for so much would go so far as to invoke the well-documented Betrayal of the Assumption of the Presence of Affectionate Prose maneuver. Quote subject: “Looking back, I’m glad I got BAPAP’d. It just feels so great to finally be one of the *normal* people.”