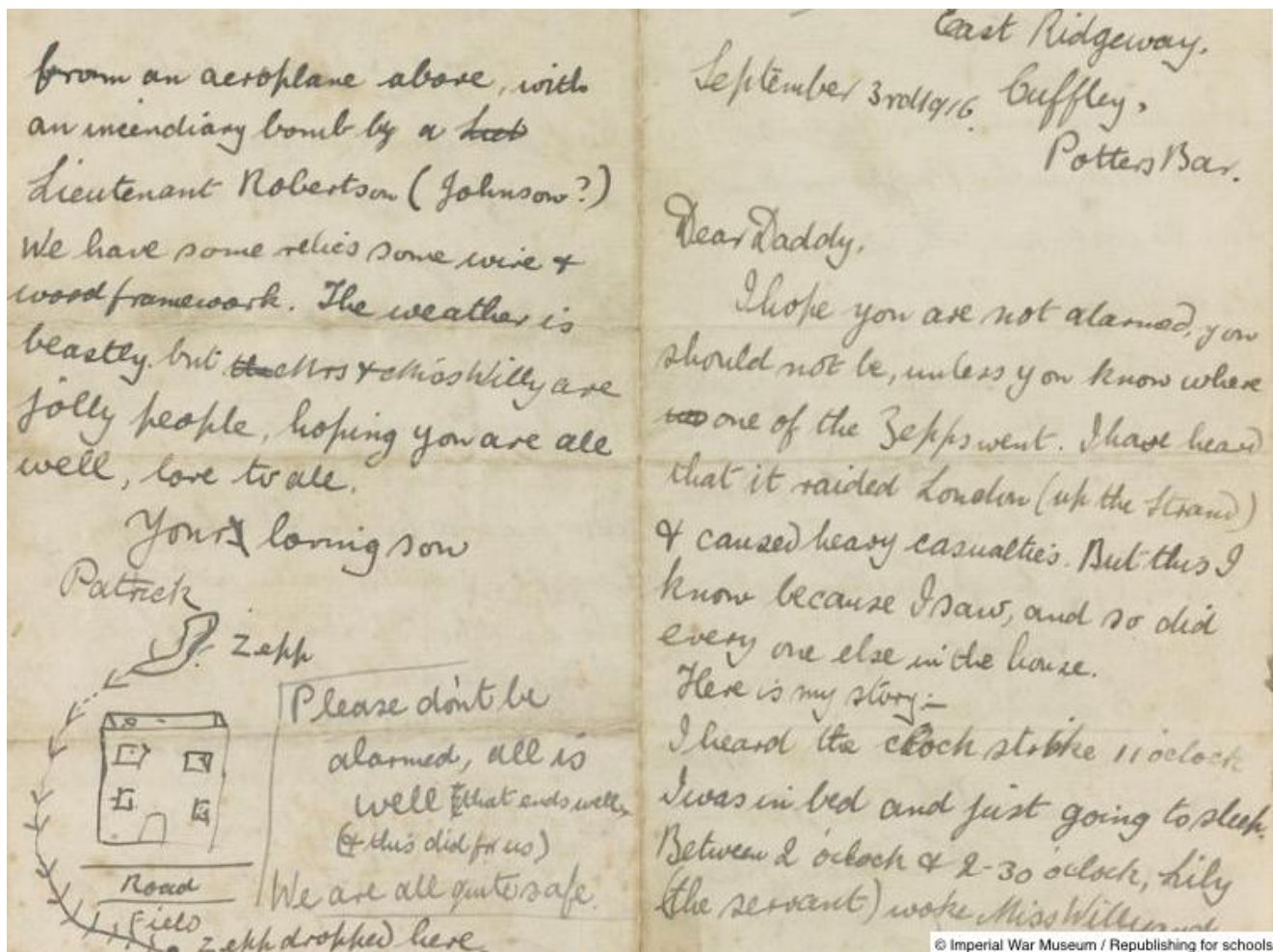


[theday.co.uk/writers-lament-the-lost-art-of-letter-writing-3](https://www.theday.co.uk/writers-lament-the-lost-art-of-letter-writing-3)



**History:** This WW1 letter from a schoolboy to his father contains an account of the destruction of a Zeppelin airship.

**Should we write more letters? Online chat is instantaneous, so we rarely think of sending a message by post. But some say we could be creating a meaningful and lasting record.**

"What do you take me for?" wrote a **Babylonian** to a **merchant** in one of the oldest known letters. It was written on a clay tablet 3,775 years ago.

Today, letters may be dying out. In the UK, the Royal Mail has raised prices after the number of letters dropped to a record low. In Australia, only 3% of letters are non-business related.

Queen Atossa posted the first handwritten letter in 500 BC. She began a rich tradition of letters: from Saint Paul's **epistles** in the Bible to the love letters of **Virginia Woolf**.

But in the US, 37% say they haven't sent a letter in the last five years.<sup>1</sup>

Does it matter? The author Edwina Preston thinks so. She says a letter is "a powerful time capsule". She gives some reasons why we should write them:

**They are more personal.** The handwriting and spelling mistakes of a letter remind us of the writer. Letters are treasured possessions and historical objects.

**They make us slow down.** Writing, posting and waiting for a reply is a "commitment of time". It shows how much we care about the other person.

**They are a slice of life.** A letter is a mix of everything. In the first known letter by a Christian, a man named Arrianus asks his brother for a recipe for fish sauce.

**They outlive us.** The ancient Roman **Seneca** wrote his philosophy in 124 letters to his young friend Lucilius. His letters have been read for hundreds of years.

Letters contain personal experiences, like the two billion passed to and from the British trenches in World War One.<sup>2</sup> Or they can change history, like US president Abraham Lincoln's letter declaring his **opposition** to slavery.

Some may outlive humanity. The Voyager spaceship is in deep space. Onboard is a "golden record" with a letter for alien life. Greetings in 55 languages include the message: "Hello from the children of planet Earth."

## Should we write more letters?

1. According to a YouGov poll of 1,717 US adults.

2. In 1917, 19,000 mail bags crossed the English Channel every day to take parcels and letters to and from the Western Front.

## Snail mail

**Yes:** Next time you want to tell someone how you feel or what you have seen or done, grab a pen and write it down. Your personal letter will be a special present that a friend or loved one will keep forever.

**No:** How you communicate does not matter. Not everyone expresses themselves best through written words and today's technology means we can connect with anyone anytime in so many different ways.

**Or...** Maybe letter writing is dead. But we can still read the letters of relatives, and famous and ordinary people from history. Their wisdom and experience may change how we communicate with each other.

## Some people say

*"Letter writing is the only device combining solitude with good company."*

**Lord Byron (1788 – 1824), English poet**

*"Interesting to think that words on a page can create a disturbance in a brain, thousands of miles or hundreds of years away."*

**George Saunders (1958 – ), American writer**

*What do you think?*

## Six steps to discovery

### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Do you like getting things in the post?

### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: Will electronic messages last longer than letters?

### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Find three facts in the article that show that fewer people are writing letters.

### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You have had the most exciting day of your life. Who will you write to and tell your story?

### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - In small groups, write a letter from humanity to an alien planet.

### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - Write a letter to a friend about the best thing you have done together.

## Glossary

**Babylonian** - An ancient Akkadian-speaking state located in southern Mesopotamia. It was south of present-day Baghdad, Iraq.

**Merchant** - Somebody who buys and sells lots of goods.

**Epistles** - Letters. In the New Testament, some books are epistles from apostles.

**Virginia Woolf** - An English novelist (1882 - 1941) whose best-known books include *Mrs Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*.

**Seneca** - A Roman philosopher.

**Opposition** - Being against something.