

**THE ART OF LETTER-  
WRITING, ILLUSTRATED BY  
EXAMPLES FROM THE  
BEST AUTHORS**

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The Art of Letter-Writing, Illustrated by Examples from the Best Authors by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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BEST AUTHORS**





THE ART  
OF  
LETTER-WRITING.

ILLUSTRATED BY

Examples from the Best Authors.

Now let us take our leave,  
At Milan, let me hear from thee by letters,  
Of thy success in life, and what thou dost  
Bestowest here in absence of the friend;  
And I likewise will visit thee with mine.



LONDON:  
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;  
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1867.

270. g. 131



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## Simple Directions for Letter-Writing.

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**T**HE best directions for good reading are: Read as you speak, read as you feel, read as if you felt what you are saying; so the best directions for good writing are: Write as you speak, write just what you have to say, write exactly the things you feel, exactly the words you would say if your correspondent were sitting by you—in short, to use Lady Hesketh's phrase, write "what comes uppermost;" so your letters will be true, fresh, life-like and interesting.

The best direction that could be given for letter-writing is, to ask you to call imagination to your aid. Fancy your friend or correspondent to be sitting by you, say what you would say if such were the case, and then write it down. Do this, and your letter cannot fail to be what a letter ought to be,—a picture of *your* thoughts, interesting to your correspondent in exactly the same proportion as he or she is interested in yourself or your concerns.

No one speaks in the longest words he can pick out of the dictionary; no one speaks in studied phrases, such as may be read in pedantic books; and no one ought to write in such. The best writing for letters is natural, unstudied flowing fresh from the heart—just "what comes uppermost."

## 6 *Simple Directions for Letter-Writing.*

Cowper, one of the most pleasing of letter-writers, one who best understood the art, says he "likes *talking* letters." This little word reveals the secret of letter-writing. If your friend likes you he will like your talk; and if your letters are to be (as they are intended to be) a substitute for your presence, they must be *talking* letters—letters written just as you would speak if your friend were present.

The same direction may be given even for letters of business; for if your head is full of the business in which you are engaged, and if you are doing it heartily, your words will flow freely in speaking. Write down what you would say, do not wait to study phrases, and your letters will be ten times more to the point than all the fancy models ever written by uninterested people. Every one possesses a degree of natural eloquence on subjects which touch the feelings deeply. A mother pleading for a situation for her son, a father interceding in behalf of a child, if they will but write down the words that rise naturally to their lips, will write from the heart a thousandfold better than a letter in the most studied phrases, written as a model by a person *fancying*, not *feeling*, the case.

In this little book, therefore, we offer you not models to copy, but specimens of the styles of others, by which you may see the easy, unconstrained, playful style in which the best writers have written their letters.

The style of their books and studied compositions may be lofty, grave, or even stiff; the friendly letter is easy and unstudied.

By ease, however, we do not mean slovenliness or imprudence. There are many things that ought not to be said, and, of course, should still less be written; as an idle or ill-natured word spoken may be forgotten, but if written it remains as a witness against the writer. An attention to correctness in spelling and grammar is of course necessary, to escape being



## *Simple Directions for Letter-Writing.* 7

thought wholly uneducated; and there are many little common decorums and etiquettes in the modes of addressing others with which it is well to be acquainted.

For all these, it may be profitable to read a few specimens of really good letters by good writers; that by observing these we may form our own style by them, not copy them.

"The fundamental requisite for good writing," says Blair (speaking of letter-writing), "is to be natural and simple." The style ought to be easy and unconstrained. For this reason the style of letters has often been chosen by those who wished to communicate instruction or give information in a simple form. These differ, of course, from the ordinary letters of one friend to another, as, though written in the same style, they are more on subjects of general interest. A few specimens of these also are given.

"Much of the merit and the agreeableness of epistolary writing will depend on its introducing us into some acquaintance with the writer. There, if anywhere, we look for the man, not for the author. Its first and fundamental requisite is, to be natural and simple; for a stiff and laboured manner is as bad in a letter as it is in conversation. This does not banish sprightliness and wit. These are graceful in letters, just as they are in conversation,—when they flow easily, and without being studied,—when employed so as to season, not to cloy. One who, either in conversation or in letters, affects to shine and to sparkle always, will not please long. The style of letters should not be too highly polished. It ought to be neat and correct, but no more. All nicety about words betrays study; and hence musical periods, and appearances of number and harmony in arrangement, should be carefully avoided in letters. The best letters are commonly such as the authors have written with most facility. What the heart or the imagination dictates always flows readily; but where

## 8 *Simple Directions for Letter-Writing.*

there is no subject to warm or interest these, constraint appears; and hence, those letters of mere compliment, congratulation, or affected condolence, which have cost the authors most labour in composing, and which, for that reason, they perhaps consider as their masterpieces, never fail of being the most disagreeable and insipid to readers."





## THE ART OF LETTER-WRITING.

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### PART I.

#### Letters on Letter-Writing.

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##### LORD JEFFREY TO MR. R. MOREHEAD.

HEREFORDSHIRE, 22nd Dec. 1796.

MY DEAR BOB,—I miss you more here than I did in Edinburgh; and, though I only came here yesterday, I can live no longer without talking to you in some way or other. While I was at home, I used to imagine that you were here as usual, and did not feel myself more separated than I was during the whole of last winter. But here, where I am so much accustomed to be with you, I am made sensible of wanting you morning, noon, and night, &c.

Have you ever observed that the letters of friends are filled with egotism? For my part I think very suspiciously of every letter that is not, and propose my own as a model to you in this respect. Indeed, when a man writes, as I do now, merely from the loquacity of friendship, and the recollection of personal intimacy, what subject can he have but himself, or the person to whom he writes? His letter, therefore, will be a succession of egotisms and inquiries, which will fall to be answered by egotisms and retaliated inquiries. Such letters are