

**THE ART OF SOCIAL  
LETTER WRITING: TWELVE  
CHARMING STUDIES**

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The Art of Social Letter Writing: Twelve Charming Studies by Josephine Turck Baker

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**JOSEPHINE TURCK BAKER**

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# The Art of Social Letter Writing

Twelve Charming Studies

BY  
JOSEPHINE TURCK BAKER

AUTHOR OF

CORRECT ENGLISH: A COMPLETE GRAMMAR  
TEN THOUSAND WORDS: HOW TO PRONOUNCE THEM  
THE ART OF CONVERSATION: TWELVE GOLDEN RULES  
HOW CAN I INCREASE MY VOCABULARY:  
TWELVE GOLDEN GUIDES  
CORRECT ENGLISH IN THE HOME  
THE CORRECT ENGLISH DRILL BOOK  
AND EDITOR OF THE MAGAZINE  
CORRECT ENGLISH: HOW TO USE IT

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### INTRODUCTORY.

The old-time epistle, with its many pages crossed and re-crossed, has "passed," and the brief note or letter has taken its place. The telegraph, the telephone, the railroad and the touring car, have each helped to bridge the distance that was, at one time, almost wholly covered by correspondence, so that a few brief lines now answer, in the main, for all written communications of a social nature, except those between a lover and his lass or a doting mother and her child.

But whether we "take our pen in hand" to write merely a note of invitation, acceptance, or regret; of congratulation or condolence; of introduction or recommendation; or, prompted by the demands of love or friendship, we fashion our letters after those of our grandparents, we all feel the importance of an understanding of the art by which we are able to express our meaning in clear, accurate, forceful language, and in a style that conforms to the standards of accepted social usage.

In writing, even more than in speech, is betrayed one's lack of education. In conversation, the awkward expression, the careless pronunciation, the grammatical error, may pass as a mere "slip of the tongue," and thus

## INTRODUCTORY

be overlooked; but not in the case of a letter. A hurried scrawl, written on ruled paper, perhaps, with errors in spelling and in construction, will mark the writer as greatly, if not wholly, lacking in education and refinement; while, on the other hand, a letter well written as to penmanship and correct as to diction, on unruled paper of excellent quality, will at once stamp the writer as of the "elect," even though he may not, in reality, possess the erudition that his letter seems to evidence.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon the importance of understanding this branch of education. With the present facilities for acquiring this knowledge, it is within the power of every ambitious person to learn the art of correct letter writing, correct in all the essentials—form, penmanship, spelling, and construction.

No other branch of our education is more important than that which teaches us how to write correctly, for our written words are the mute, but unmistakable, witnesses of the degree of education and culture that we possess. Certainly, no other branch is more worthy of our close attention and study. In the following studies in diction, and in the instructions on form in the Reference Department, it is hoped that the student will find such suggestions as will help him to understand more clearly than ever before the rules that govern the art of correct social letter writing.—The Author.

## STUDY NUMBER I.

*New York City, January 1, 1909.*

*My dear<sup>1</sup> Caro:*

*You were very kind to say that you should<sup>2</sup> be pleased to have me write to you, and that you would<sup>3</sup> correct any errors that I might make. I regard this as a golden opportunity, and I assure you that I shall<sup>4</sup> be greatly obliged to you if you will comment on my diction, pro and con.*

*I arrived in<sup>5</sup> New York on Saturday, and I am having a delightful time. I have already seen many of my old-time friends, and they are showing me every<sup>6</sup> attention.*

*I do not know if<sup>7</sup> I shall be able to say anything about New York that will be of interest, for you have been here so many times that I am sure I can tell you nothing new. Saturday, I am going with some friends to their country*



home in<sup>7</sup> Dobbs Ferry and shall stay until Monday, and on Sunday we are going<sup>8</sup> to drive to Sleepy Hollow. I have long wanted to visit the home and burial place of Washington Irving and now I am to do so. I wish I was<sup>9</sup> able to describe to you the magnificent scenery of the Hudson,—the glorious Palisades of the Hudson!—but I forget that you, too, have had the same opportunity that I am now having, of seeing these marvelous wonders of nature. I must tell you about a gentleman from Georgia, who<sup>10</sup> I had the pleasure of meeting a few days since. He told me that he had laid<sup>11</sup> awake all night in order to see the Palisades and had then fallen asleep just in time to miss them.

The days pass very quickly. As Artemus Ward said, "Time passes; it is a way that time has." It doesn't seem possible that it is<sup>12</sup> a week to-morrow since I arrived here. I cannot tell when I will<sup>13</sup> return to Chicago, as I may go abroad next month. In the meantime I shall esteem it a favor if you will comment on any errors that my letter may contain.

*Hoping to have the pleasure of hearing from you very soon, I am<sup>14</sup>*

*Very devotedly yours,<sup>15</sup>*

*Catherine.*

## NOTES.

1. *Dear* is properly capitalized only when it begins the salutation; as, "Dear Caro," but "My dear Caro."

2. *Should* is correct to express futurity or condition beyond the control of the will, in all three persons after the verbs *say, think, fear, doubt, hope*, when the reference is to the person quoted; as: "*I said* (thought, feared, etc.) that *I should* be pleased," etc.; "*You said* (thought, feared, etc.) that *you should* be pleased," etc.; "*He said* (thought, feared, etc.) that *he should* be pleased, etc. When promise or determination is expressed, *would* is used; as, "*I said* that *I would* correct your errors;" "*You said* that *you would* correct," etc.; "*He said* that *he would*," etc.

3. "I *shall* be obliged," is correct, condition beyond the control of the will being expressed.

Rule.—*Shall* in the first person, and *will* in the second and the third, express either simple futurity or condition beyond the control of the will.

4. One arrives *at*, not *in* a place. (One *arrives at* large cities as well as at small places, because the city is regarded as a mere geographical point.)

5. Say either *every* kind of attention, or a *great deal* of attention.

6. *Whether*, and not *if*, should be used to introduce an alternative, *if* being used to introduce a supposition; as, "I do not know *whether* I shall be able," etc., "I shall not go *if* it rains."

7. *At*, not *in*, is used of small places.

8. *Going*, in the sense of what one is just about to do, or will do later, is in accordance with the usage of the language.