

Point out in what the beauty of those pieces consists, and in what particular respects they are chiefly to be imitated; 3. Vary his selections so as to improve, now some, then other talents of his pupils. A learner trained on one model or to one kind of style only, would not bring all his powers into play; he would not acquire a well-developed mind nor all the beauty of language which is within his reach.

## CHAPTER II.

## LETTERS.

315. A **letter** is a written communication on any subject from one person to another. Letters deserve most careful study; for, 1. No species of composition is more generally used by all classes of persons. 2. A negligently written letter may entail very injurious consequences. 3. Many will judge of a person's character and attainments from his epistolary correspondence.

It makes a considerable difference in our style whether we write as officials or business men, or as individual members of society. We may, therefore, usefully distinguish letters into **two kinds**—*official* or *business* letters and *unofficial* letters. We class official and business letters together, because they are mainly subject to the same rules.

## ARTICLE I. OFFICIAL OR BUSINESS LETTERS.

316. We call **official** or **business letters** all those written by a person in the capacity of an officer, a professional man, a merchant, or a tradesman. In all such correspondence the following are the leading rules:

*Rule 1.*—Be very **clear**, so that your exact meaning cannot fail to be understood at first sight. Read your letter over with close attention to see that all your thoughts are correctly, fully, and clearly expressed.

*Rule 2.*—Take care that the **handwriting** be legible, else you may get *boots* for *books*, *matches* for *hatchets* or *latches*, *two ponies* instead of *100 pansies*.

*Rule 3.*—Be **brief** and to the point; business men have no time to waste.

*Rule 4.*—Confine yourself to **strict business**. If you wish to add matters of friendship, it is well to write them on a separate leaf, that the business portion may be separately filed.

*Rule 5.*—Write **grammatical and idiomatic** English, but without any attempt at figures—in the plain style.

*Rule 6.*—Observe the received **formalities**, which are now to be explained.

The **formalities of epistolary correspondence** are not uniform in all countries. The general tendency of Americans is towards simplicity in forms: they consult the convenience of all persons concerned, showing proper respect for every one, but using few idle compliments. We shall notice the points most generally agreed upon, without condemning such departures from these directions as are authorized by common sense and respectable practice.

317. Here is an **example** of official correspondence. It is taken from General Sherman's *Memoirs*; most of the letters in that work are on the same simple plan:

HEADQUARTERS ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES, }  
CITY POINT, VIRGINIA, December 26, 1864. }

*Major-General W. T. Sherman, Savannah, Georgia:*

GENERAL: Your very interesting letter of the 22d inst, brought by Major Gray, of General Foster's staff, is just at hand. As the major starts back at once, I can do no more at present than simply acknowledge its receipt. The capture of Savannah, with all its immense stores, must tell upon the people of the South. All well here. Yours truly,

U. S. GRANT, *Lieutenant-General.*

318. We call attention to some **special formalities** in general use.

1. Write on white paper with black ink, leaving a half-inch margin at the left side. Use letter or note size, but never tear nor cut off a part. Decided colors, odd patterns, gaudy pictures are in bad taste.

2. Leave at least one inch vacant on the top of the first page.

3. Put on the first line, and to the right, your own post-office **address**; and, either on the same line or on the next, the **date**—that is, the month, day, and year; also the hour, if necessary.

319. 4. On the next line, and beginning near the margin, put the **name, title, and address** of the person or firm you write to. This inside address, as it has been called, may occupy one or two, or even three, lines. It should be complete enough to distinguish the party addressed from all others (as the letter will be filed without the envelope); but it need not be so detailed as the outside address on the envelope.

It is more formal, when addressing dignitaries, to omit or abridge the directions at the head of the letter, and to write the whole address below the signature to the left.

320. Care should be taken to give every one his **proper title**. The following titles are in common use:

In writing to the Pope, "His Holiness, Leo XIII."

To a cardinal, "His Eminence."

To an archbishop, "The Most Rev. P. R. Kenrick (with or without D.D.)"

To a bishop, "The Rt. Rev. — (D.D.)"

To a priest, "Rev. —."

To the President and Vice-President of the United States, "The President," "The Vice-President."

To a governor or foreign minister, "His Excellency."

To members of Congress and other high officers of the State, to judges, aldermen, etc., "The Hon."

After the name of a lawyer or a justice of peace, "Esq." (nothing before it).

To a military officer, "General," "Colonel," "Captain," "Lieutenant."

To private persons, "Mr.," "Master" (for a young boy), "Messrs." or Misses (for a firm), "Mrs. John Brown" (for the wife of John Brown), "Mrs. Mary Brown" (for his widow), "Miss Brown" (for his eldest daughter), "Miss Julia Brown" (for a younger daughter), etc.

321. 5. Next comes the **salutation**:

"Holy Father" or "Your Holiness," "Your Grace," "Your Lordship," "Rev. Father," or "Your Reverence."

"Mr. President," "Mr. Vice-President."

"Your Excellency," "Your Honor."

"General," "Colonel," etc.

"Sir," "Gentlemen" or "Ladies," "Madam," "Miss."

The word "Dear" denotes acquaintance and respect, but not familiarity: the terms "Sir," "Madam," "Miss" look rather formal without "Dear." "My Dear" is considered by some as more familiar, by others as less so.

322. 6. Begin the first **paragraph** at the point where the salutation ends, or on the next line just below it. The other paragraphs will commence about half an inch from the margin.

323. 7. The letter should end with the **subscription**, which consists of two parts—viz., an expression of respect and the signature. The expression of respect often forms part of the last paragraph; at other times it stands separately, and then it usually begins about the middle of the line. The following forms are common in official correspondence:

"I am, with respect, your obedient servant"; "I have the honor to be your obedient servant"; "Very respectfully yours"; "Yours truly"; "Sincerely yours"; "Yours thankfully," etc.

324. 8. Make as few **folds** in the letter as possible. With a full-sized sheet turn the lower on the upper edge and make a fold in the middle; fold the double into three parts. See that the letter does not adhere to the inside of the envelope. The envelope should be suitable to the paper, and both should be of an approved pattern.

325. 9. **On the envelope** put the stamp near the right upper corner. About the middle of the envelope write the name and title of the party addressed; on the next line, a little more to the right, the number of the house and the name of the street (or, for small places, of the town and county); below, the name of the city; and, lastly, that of the State. Take great care that the directions be so explicit as to prevent all possibility of mistake.

10. In **answering** business letters (or any letters that require a direct answer) begin by mentioning the items to which you are replying; thus:

"Yours of the 25th inst. came to hand. You desire to know . . ."

"Your order for . . . is received."

"Your favor of the 30th ult. enclosing check for seventy-five dollars (\$75) on Farmers' Bank, St. Louis, is received and credited to your account, in full payment for . . ."

326. 11. A **note** may be written in the third person throughout; e.g.:

"Mr. Jno. Green will call on Mr. W. Smith on next Thursday at three P.M."

This is often a convenient form for postal cards.

327. 12. When sending a **telegram** the great rule is to convey all the necessary information briefly and in such language as is most apt to be correctly transmitted. Proper names are often mistaken and punctuation marks utterly neglected in the transmission. The formalities of titles, etc., may be dispensed with in telegrams.

328. 13. When it is necessary to add an item after the letter is finished, we begin by making **P. S.** (postscript) near the margin below the last line of the letter, and then state briefly what we have to say; if there is no evident reason for our former omission, we premise a word of excuse.

329. **Exercise 1.**—Write a letter purporting to order from the publisher a dozen copies of this text-book, or of another book designated by the teacher; and submit the letter to him for criticism on all particulars.

330. **Exercise 2.**—Write a letter purporting to send payment for the books received.

331. **Exercise 3.**—Write in the name of the book-firm to acknowledge receipt of payment.

332. Examples:

*A Note.*

*Mr. & Mrs. ———*  
*request the pleasure of*  
*.....Company*  
*at dinner on Friday,*  
*Jan. 19th, at 7½ o'clock.*

*A Card.*

*Mr. & Mrs. ———*  
*At Home,*  
*Wednesday, April the eleventh,*  
*from four until six o'clock,*  
*and from eight until eleven o'clock.*  
*No. ——— Second Avenue.*

*An informal, familiar Letter.*

*No. — H Street,*  
*Washington.*

*Dear Julia,*

*Will you not come to dine*  
*with us to-morrow, Saturday, at 7 o'clock?*  
*We shall be so glad to see you. I hope*  
*that you have no other engagement.*

*Affectionately yours,*  
*Agnes Smith.*

*Jan. 2d, Friday*

*An Envelope.*

[Stamp]

*Mrs. Lily Tulip,*  
*Elm Grove Mansion,*  
*Acacia,*  
*Linwood Co.,*  
*Florida.*

ROSEBUD VILLAGE, Merrydale Co., Ind.,  
 April 1, 1886.

*Mrs. Lily Tulip,*  
*Acacia, Florida.*

MY DEAR MOTHER:

I have just received your kind favor of the 25th ult. in which you inform me that you desire me to return as soon as convenient. Much as I enjoy the scenery here, and especially the affection of my excellent uncle and aunt, I shall be happy to comply with your wishes. You may look for me on next Saturday morning. I have so many good things to say to you, but the postboy is waiting for this letter. Do take good care of your health; here all are well and send love.

Your loving daughter,

FLORA.

## ARTICLE II. UNOFFICIAL LETTERS.

333. **Unofficial letters** are such as are written by any person in his private capacity, as an individual member of society. They may be dictated by friendship, by charity or kindness, by politeness, by respect, by gratitude, by self-interest, or by any other reasonable motive.

There is one important **difference** between official and unofficial letters—namely, that the former exclude sentiment, and the latter admit it freely; the former proceed solely from the head, the latter often from the heart, though, of course, under the guidance of the head. Now, when the heart is interested the imagination is stirred, and literature, in the strict meaning of the word, is the result; then there is room for tropes and figures and other ornaments of style, and, in particular, for the display of the most delicate taste. Epistolary correspondence does not admit the bolder figures of oratory: any attempt at splendor is objectionable in letters. We must charm by gentler beauties, by appropriateness, by modest plays of the imagination, by genial warmth of sentiment.

334. The **style** of these letters should generally be:

(a) *Correct*, as is the language of educated men in conversation; still, somewhat more chastened—*i.e.*, free from all that is rather tolerated than approved. Apparent negligence may be sometimes agreeable; real negligence never.

(b) *Appropriate* to the subject, the persons, the occasion, etc.; on important matters grave, on common ones neat, elegant and playful on trifling ones, etc.

(c) *Concise*, pruning away long introductions, unnecessary developments, diffuse reasoning, especially to men of little leisure. Familiar letters may be more diffuse.

(d) *Modest*, avoiding long periods, bold figures, etc.

(e) *Graceful*, selecting neat constructions and all kinds

of modest ornaments, such as obvious comparisons, natural metaphors, brief narrations and descriptions, pithy sayings, witty and humorous reflections, etc.

335. We shall treat with some detail of the principal species of such letters:

I. **Letters of friendship** are such as are dictated by mutual affection between relatives and friends. They should be natural, easy, frank, without the least affectation. "I wish you to open to me your soul, not your library," said Mme. de Sévigné, who wrote exquisitely herself. Such letters may treat of any subject of common interest to the parties concerned. Their language is that of the heart. Kindness, affection, charity, good-nature should dictate, prudence and common sense supervise them.

336. **Their charm will depend** chiefly on the intelligence and the amiable character of the writer. Whatever, therefore, will quicken or develop our intelligence, but especially whatever will improve our character, making us more sociable, unselfish, considerate, etc., will improve our familiar correspondence. Persons too dull to have any original thoughts, those incapable of warm feelings, pretentious persons who cannot write without affectation, vainglorious ones who can think of nothing but self, deceitful characters incapable of candor, are not likely to succeed in this species of composition. On the other hand, intelligent persons with warm-hearted, modest, and open characters are sure to succeed, provided they do not take a wrong view of their task. What is that task? It is to make others happy for time and eternity. See what your friend would like to hear; anticipate his queries; speak of yourself for the sake of your friend. Avoid overwrought sentimentality: it is distasteful, because unreal. Genuine goodness and gentle piety are attractive.

337. "A light, easy, playful **style** is most appropriate in

friendship" (*American Gentleman*). Still, the modest ornaments of style are here in place. Happy turns of expression, delicate allusions, innocent hints, ingenious fault-finding, pleasing anecdotes, and pen-pictures have a pleasant effect, but all must be natural. "If you run after wit," says Montesquieu, "you will catch folly." "Most persons write ill," says Chesterfield, "because they aim at writing better than they can, by which means they acquire a formal and unnatural style; whereas to write well you must write easily and naturally."

338. In **telling news** be not a gossip, do not make known the secrets of others; handle the names of others with respect, so that, if they should happen to see the letter (as they may sooner or later), they could not be offended with you; be charitable and prudent. Relate facts with order and clearness, in a pleasant style.

339. II. **Letters of Congratulation**—such as are written on occasion of the New Year, a birthday, a patronal feast, or when a friend has met with some uncommon good-fortune—should be dictated by genuine friendship and sincere esteem, and expressed modestly without any exaggerated praise. Never flatter—*i.e.*, never praise what you feel does not deserve it—but let your friend see that you love him and that you rejoice with him for his sake, not for the advantage his success may bring you.

340. In **New Year's letters**, etc., express gratitude for all that parents and others have done for you, sorrow for the grief you may have caused them, a promise of more thoughtful conduct in the future, with a hope that God will grant you time to fulfil your promise. Add good wishes, and a prayer for the blessings of Heaven on the new year. The writing should be most careful, to show respect and to prove you have profited by your opportunities to learn. In all such letters one good thought, one happy

hit, is more pleasing than four rambling pages: it is more creditable to the writer and more acceptable to the reader.

341. III. **Letters of Condolence.** These require great skill and care. Act like the humane surgeon who touches the wound gently, and only to heal it. If your correspondent knows the sad news already, sympathize sincerely with him: "What a loss sustained! what hopes disappointed!" Hit as it were accidentally on a motive of consolation drawn from reason, or, better, from religion, and develop it skilfully. If you are to announce the bad news yourself prepare the way slowly; suggest motives of resignation to God's will beforehand; state the news at last as delicately as you can. Express your grief again before you conclude.

342. IV. **Letters of Introduction or Recommendation** require special prudence. Think first whether it is proper to write such a letter at all for such a person.

"Consider well for whom you pledge your name,  
Lest without guilt you bear another's shame."—*Horace.*

Avoid two dangers: do not offend the applicant for a recommendation; do not deceive your correspondent by exaggerated praise of the one recommended.

If the applicant is *worthy* state his merits, express reasonable confidence in him, ask your friend's interest in his behalf as a personal favor to yourself. If he is *unworthy* or doubtfully worthy, give him a letter which he will prefer not to present; for every such letter is an open letter, which the bearer is expected to read before delivering. It may be necessary to write by mail to the third party, informing him, before the letter is presented to him, of certain facts which could not be mentioned in the recommendation. Write on the envelope, below the address, towards the left: "To introduce Mr. —."

343. V. **Letters of Petition** should be modest and every way moderate. Ingratiate yourself in a manly way; state your reasons briefly but forcibly; show your appreciation of the trouble your correspondent may be put to in consequence of the favor; promise gratitude.

In answering such letters favorably be brief and show your pleasure at rendering the little service asked. Say as little as possible of the trouble it costs, or of limitation or conditions. In refusing show how reluctantly you do so; give good reasons for it. Express your hope of finding, some other time, a better opportunity of showing your affection or esteem.

344. VI. **Letters of Thanks** should never be neglected when a favor has been received. Express your appreciation both of the favor and of the kindness with which it was bestowed. Hope for an opportunity, not of repaying the person, but of showing your gratitude.

345. We add some further directions for epistolary **correspondence in general**:

1. Give *advice* sparingly: do not volunteer it except for very special reasons; if asked give it cautiously, modestly, appearing to mistrust your views unless there is a principle at stake. If there is, state it modestly but firmly: in this, as in all things else, honesty is the best policy.

2. If you must *find fault*, do so reluctantly and as gently as circumstances will allow; but if it is your clear duty to do it at all, do it with manly firmness.

3. To *excuse* yourself rather exaggerate than hide your fault; express sorrow; then touch upon palliating circumstances, or explain how the mistake arose; promise care for the future.

346. **Eminent letter-writers** are few. Cicero's is the best collection: he corresponded in a charming style with the greatest men of his age on all manners of subjects;

but he wrote simply what the circumstances actually suggested, without any intention of publishing his letters.

Pliny's are highly, even excessively, polished.

Dean Swift's are unaffected, but they want discretion and betray many of his defects of character.

Popè's are entertaining, witty, and refined, but too evidently labored.

Chesterfield's are natural, but often indelicate, and in other ways wanting in a Christian spirit.

Lady Mary Montagu has much ease and vivacity, and a very agreeable epistolary style.

In French, Madame de Sévigné is considered a charming model of familiar correspondence; still, she is too talkative for English taste.

The letters of Eugénie de Guérin are among the most perfect models in this species of literature.

347. **Exercises.**—Write one letter of each species, the particular circumstances being suggested by your teacher.