

# Unit 10. Directed writing

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*Letter writing*



# What is a letter?

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A letter is a written message that can be handwritten or printed on paper.

You may need to write a letter in your studies, or in real life. You may be asked to read some information and write a letter in response. The following are just three examples of the type of letter you might be asked to write:



A letter of complaint or enquiry to a company.



A letter to a magazine or newspaper, commenting on the material and giving your reaction.



A letter explaining or apologising for a problem.

# As with any piece of writing, remember to think about the audience and the purpose.

- 1. Whom are you writing to?** This will help you to decide how formal your letter needs to be. If it is a letter to a friend, for instance, it can be in a chatty style and you can use some informal, colloquial language. For example: instead of 'I feel I must express my views on ...' it would be more appropriate to say 'I must tell you what I thought about...!'
- 2. What are you writing for?** Is it to complain, to make a request, to apologise, or to defend or attack a particular point of view? The answer to this question will have an effect on how you write. For example, if it is a letter to a company then your point must be clearly ordered and written in a systematic, logical way. One important point: even if your letter is making a complaint about a situation or attacking someone else's opinion, it should never be abusive or rude.

# How should your letter be set out?

Although the layout of a letter may not be as important as the content, you should follow certain guidelines.



Study the layouts for a personal letter and a formal letter below. You must set your letter out neatly; there is never any excuse for an untidy-looking letter.





# Examples of letters

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*Read these two letters about  
a dog that got out of control.*

A close-up photograph of a fountain pen with a gold nib and a silver barrel, positioned on the right side of a piece of light-colored, textured paper. The pen is in the process of writing the word "Dear" in a fluid, cursive script. The word is written in dark ink and is the central focus of the image. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light brown color, suggesting a desk or a similar surface. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the upper right, which creates a soft shadow of the pen on the paper and highlights the texture of the paper and the metallic sheen of the pen's nib.

Dear



The letter starts by getting straight to the point.

A development paragraph clearly explains exactly what happened.

The third paragraph neatly rounds off the letter with a return to the opening.

The letter started with a name, so the ending is correct.

Dear Mrs Arensky,

I would like to apologise for the unfortunate incident that I caused in your mini-market last Thursday. I have talked it over with my parents who have suggested that I write to you to explain how it happened.

I admit that it was my fault in bringing my pet mouse, Minnie, into your shop in the first place. She was in a box as I was taking her to my friend's house as she was going to look after Minnie for me while I was away on a school trip. Unfortunately, as I approached the meat counter, I bumped against one of your fixtures, dropped the box and Minnie escaped. She set off with me behind her. As she scampered around, many of the other shoppers started to panic. One lady screamed and jumped out of the way and, without looking where she was heading, fell into a pile of eggs which crashed to the floor and broke. People started to slip over, and in no time at all there was total disorder. I eventually managed to recapture Minnie who had stopped to eat some soft fruit that another customer had dropped.

Although it was really just an accident, I realise that it is my responsibility to apologise and to offer to pay for the damage. My parents have generously said they will lend me the money which I can pay back over what will probably have to be a very long period of time.

Yours sincerely,

Olga Mishkin

No paragraphing and the content is not ordered.

The tone of the letter is all wrong – it is not apologetic but it is complaining.

The content of the letter is distorted as Olga tries to shift the blame.

Given that this is a formal letter, the ending is incorrect. It should be 'Yours sincerely'.

Dear Mrs Arensky,

My parents have made me write this letter though I don't think it's fair. You should blame the person who left the fixture sticking out into the aisle of the shop. You can't blame Minnie for escaping when I dropped her as she doesn't know any better and you can't blame me for chasing after her. And you have to admit it is a bit silly to put all those eggs there. They're just asking to be knocked over, aren't they. You see, Minnie isn't used to having a large space to run around in and I couldn't stop her from running off and did my best to stop her by shouting out to her. Anyway, half the trouble was your shoppers. They didn't look where they were going. So they bumped into each other. I thought it was funny when my my maths teacher Mr Lee got trapped against the tins of vegetables and they all collapsed on him. I mean you have to laugh, don't you.

Yours,

Olga Mishkin

# Exercise 1.

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This exercise, and the one that follows, can help you to practise writing a letter.

Read carefully the article below and then complete the following task:

You have been a student at the ESBC since your family moved to Berlin three years ago. Write a letter to a friend who still lives and attends school in your old home town, telling her/him about your experiences at the ESBC and why you think your friend would or would not benefit from its approach to education. Include:

- reference to facts about the school's policies
- your feelings about the differences between this school and your previous school
- whether you would recommend the ESBC to your friend and reasons why or why not.

Write between a page and a page and a half.

# No grades, no timetable: Berlin school turns teaching upside down

**Pupils choose their own subjects and motivate themselves, an approach some say should be rolled out across Germany.**

Anton Oberländer is a persuasive speaker. Last year, when he and a group of friends were short of cash for a camping trip to Cornwall, he managed to talk Germany's national rail operator into handing them some free tickets. So impressed was the management with his chutzpah that they invited him back to give a motivational speech to 200 of their employees.

Anton, it should be pointed out, is 14 years old.

The Berlin teenager's self-confidence is largely the product of a unique educational institution that has turned the conventions of traditional teaching radically upside down. At Oberländer's school, there are no grades until students turn 15, no timetables and no lecture-style instructions. The pupils decide which subjects they want to study for each lesson and when they want to take an exam.

The school's syllabus reads like any parent's nightmare. Set subjects are limited to maths, German, English and social studies, supplemented by more abstract courses such as "responsibility" and "challenge". For challenge, students aged 12 to 14 are given €150 (\$118) and sent on an adventure that they have to plan entirely by themselves. Some go kayaking; others work on a farm. Anton went trekking along England's south coast.



The philosophy behind these innovations is simple: as the requirements of the labour market are changing, and smartphones and the internet are transforming the ways in which young people process information, the school's headteacher, Margret Rasfeld, argues, the most important skill a school can pass down to its students is the ability to motivate themselves.

"Look at three or four year olds – they are all full of self-confidence," Rasfeld says. "Often, children can't wait to start school. But frustratingly, most schools then somehow manage to untrain that confidence."

The Evangelical School Berlin Centre (ESBC) is trying to do nothing less than "reinvent what a school is", she says.

“The mission of a progressive school should be to prepare young people to cope with change, or better still, to make them look forward to change. In the 21st century, schools should see it as their job to develop strong personalities.”

Making students listen to a teacher for 45 minutes and punishing them for collaborating on an exercise, Rasfeld says, was not only out of sync with the requirements of the modern world of work, but counterproductive. “Nothing motivates students more than when they discover the meaning behind a subject of their own accord.”

Students at her school are encouraged to think up other ways to prove their acquired skills, such as coding a computer game instead of sitting a maths exam.

Oberländer, who had never been away from home for three weeks until he embarked on his challenge in Cornwall, said he learned more English on his trip than he had in several years of learning the language at school.

Germany’s federalised education structure, in which each of the 16 states plans its own education system, has

traditionally allowed “free learning” models to flourish. Yet unlike progressive schools, Rasfeld’s institution tries to embed student self-determination within a relatively strict system of rules. Students who dawdle during lessons have to come into school on Saturday morning to catch up, a punishment known as “silentium”. “The more freedom you have, the more structure you need,” says Rasfeld.

The main reason why the ESBC is gaining a reputation as Germany’s most exciting school is that its experimental philosophy has managed to deliver impressive results. Year after year, Rasfeld’s institution ends up with the best grades among Berlin’s *gesamtschulen*, or comprehensive schools, which combine all three school forms of Germany’s tertiary system. Last year’s school leavers achieved an average grade of 2.0, the equivalent of a straight B – even though 40% of the year had been advised not to continue to *abitur*, the German equivalent of A-levels, before they joined the school. Having opened in 2007 with just 16 students, the school now operates at full capacity, with 500 pupils and long waiting lists for new applicants.



***Good luck!***