

## Sixth Grade Language Arts – Composition

This week, we will not be writing what you would typically consider a “composition”. Instead, we will be focusing on a very specific sort of writing: letters. There are many types of letters which are used depending on the situation. You might write a formal letter to a businessman, asking for donations for the Jogathon. You might write a Thank You letter to an aunt for a birthday gift you received in the mail.

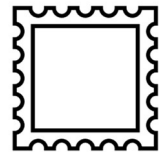
The type of letter you will be writing this week is called a **personal letter**. It is the sort of letter you would write to a friend or a classmate to say hello, keep in touch, and get all the news. While we are separated from each other in our own homes, it can be very nice to write letters. In the past, it was common for friends to write to each other. In fact, as recently as 100 years ago, if your friend lived more than a few miles away, you would have to write letters to keep in touch!

Your first letter will be addressed to me. This way, you can practice your letter-writing skills, and bring me up to date on everything that has been happening while we have been home from school. I look forward to hearing from you! Below, I will show you how to address the envelope that was sent home in your take-home packet:

*Your Name Here*

*Your Address Here*

*Your City, State, ZIP Code*



Miss Eddy  
2960 Wagner St.  
Strasburg, CO 80136

Make sure, when you write on the envelope, that you write **very neatly and clearly**. The mailman will have to be able to read it easily to make sure that your letter reaches its destination. I have already attached a stamp to your envelope. It should be enough to send it – you would only need to add more stamps if your letter were very long, and so it was thick and heavy.

*Below I will explain the layout of a typical personal letter. It is important to remember that, while you may be writing to a friend or family member, there is a proper way to write a letter. It is considered a matter of etiquette – in the same way that you should always follow certain rules for polite conversation (always say hello to someone when you see them, ask how they are doing, etc.) you should follow a certain structure when writing letters.*

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Personal letters, also known as friendly letters, normally have five (or six) parts:

**1. Heading**

This includes your address, line by line. Immediately under your address, write the date that you begin the letter. If you include your address here, the person you are writing to can write back, even if they lose the envelope your letter came in.

The heading should be written on the top left-hand side of the page.

**2. Greeting**

The greeting always ends with a comma. The greeting may be formal, beginning with the word “dear” and using the person’s title and last name; or it may be informal, if it is written to a close friend.

*Formal: “Dear Uncle Steven,” or “Dear Miss Eddy,”*

*Informal: “Hi Joe,” or “Greetings Emily,”*

The greeting should be written on the left, just after the heading. Make sure you skip a line between the heading and the greeting, and between the greeting and the body.

**3. Body**

This is also known as the main text of your letter. This includes the message you want to write. Normally the beginning of paragraphs is indented. If not indented, be sure to skip a space between paragraphs.

Skip a line before the close.

**4. Complimentary Close**

This short expression is always a few words on a single line. It ends in a comma.

*Formal: “Cordially,” or “Sincerely,” or “Respectfully,”*

*Informal: “Your friend,” or “Love,” or “Love and prayers,” or “Miss you,”*

It should be set apart from the rest of the letter – skip a line or two before you write it.

**5. Signature**

Write your name below the complimentary close. Sign your first name and last name if you are writing to someone for the first time. You can use only your first name, or a nickname, if you are writing to a friend or close family member.

**6. Postscript**

If you have something to add after you have already finished your letter, you can write it underneath the signature. This is called a postscript and should be written as a new paragraph. Begin by writing *P.S.* If you need to add *another* thought after your postscript, write it after the *P.S.*, and begin with *P.P.S.* (post postscript).

*Now we may break down the body of the letter. This is the core of your letter, and the real reason you are writing. Just like any other time we write, it is important to be organized. If your thoughts meander without any direction, your reader will be confused by the time they finish your letter, and won't know how to respond!*

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Generally, we begin with an introduction. Just like when you introduce yourself in person, it is best to begin by asking about the other person first. For example, you might write: *"I hope you are well,"* or perhaps, to a closer friend: *"How are you?"* In the case of a letter to someone you do not know (for instance to a pen pal) you would literally begin by introducing yourself. It is also a good idea to introduce yourself when you write to someone for the first time.

If it has been a long time since you have spoken, or there has been a lot going on, and you don't know where to begin with your letter, it may help to make a list of things you would like to tell to your reader before you begin, so that you do not leave anything out. If you jump from topic to topic too much, it can be hard to follow.

You want reading your letter to be as pleasant as possible, so it might be nice to put your thoughts into some kind of order that is easy to follow. If you are relating events that have taken place since you last saw each other, you might place them in chronological order. Another approach would be to talk about them in order of importance. If you begin by talking about the least important news first, and build up to the big, important news, it can make your letter exciting to read.

A personal letter is not necessarily formal. A good rule is to write *conversationally*. Try to imagine the person you are writing to standing in front of you. Use similar words and phrases as you would use in person. It can be tempting to be very stiff and formal in letters, because we are not accustomed to writing them; it doesn't have to be! Just keep in mind that the way you write to a teacher or an aunt or uncle should be different from the way you write to a classmate or friend.

Feel free to include "random" things in your letter. Once while writing a letter, C. S. Lewis wondered why it is so much easier to draw faces than it is to draw animals. Jane Austen would sometimes include a little drawing of the lace on a new dress she had bought. You do not have to restrict yourself to only talking about "important" things. Oftentimes, it is more interesting to describe small things in detail, than it is to describe big things generally. Do not be afraid to use your sense of humor, either!

You should write a closing paragraph to wrap up your letter before you write the complimentary close. This is a good time to remind the recipient that you would like to hear back from them. For example: *"I would love to hear back from you. Write me when you have the chance."* You can also ask some parting questions here: *"How has Jenny been since the accident?"* or *"Will you be able to make it to the wedding?"* Remember that people tend to remember most what they read last, so if there is something you particularly want to stick in their minds (something clever or a specific question you really want answered) it would be best to mention it right at the end.

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*Once you have finished your letter, you should read it over to make sure there is nothing you forgot. Add a postscript if you need to. Now you can fold it and put it in its envelope. You can fold it any way you like, just remember to make it neat, without too many creases.*

***P.S. – Don't forget to include your riddle in your letter, so you have a chance to win the prize! I look forward to hearing from all of you!***