

Desirous to shew my selfe thankfull...A Letter-Writing Exercise

The following provides a general idea for how you could go about writing a short thank you note in a late-period style. The example text comes from letters written around 1450-1600.

Consider writing a note thanking your B&B or an officer for their work; an artisan for giving their time and knowledge; an event steward or the person who washed the dishes. Bribe an urchin to deliver it, or hand it out in court, or put it on their feast plate. You'll make their day.

What to say and how to say it: (see the examples in The Writing of Parts)

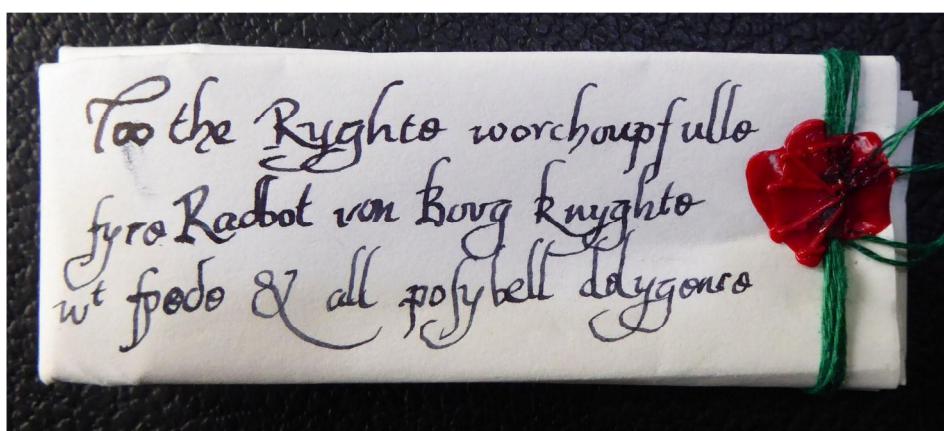
- pick a *Salutatio* suitable for your recipient and their station/relationship to you
- add a line or two from the *Narratio* samples; personalise it or make a general batch to use
- finish up with a date/location, the *Conclusio* sign-off and your signature or mark
- when you come to write, the trick is to take it slowly; use a dip pen or fountain pen

Layout and Production (see the Layout Sheet)

- before you write, fold your paper in half (ie from landscape to portrait, fold at the left)
- give the text a big left-hand margin and a narrow right-hand one; try to keep your text justified (ie lined up at the right) or make squiggles to fill any gaps; no paragraph breaks
- if writing to an equal/inferior, your *Conclusio* and signature can go directly under your writing; if writing to a superior, put it at the very bottom of the page on the right
- after you've locked and sealed your letter, you'll have space on the outside to write the *Supercryption*, or addressee and delivery instructions
- the Ludovicos font in the writing example models a simple 16C humanist hand; or try a secretary hand or bastarda for an older, more formal style (handy cheat: use a computer font to lay out the letter on a practice page, then trace over with a pen using a lightbox)
- use cream paper or hot-pressed watercolour paper (eg 110gsm); A3 is close to period-size paper and is easier to fold than A4, or go bigger to show your wealth, respect or humility

Letter-locking and Sealing (see the Layout Sheet)

The Layout Sheet shows the text area where you write, and folding instructions for one way to use floss and/or wax to lock the letter – there are 70+ known ways of letter-locking! Letters typically would be folded a couple of times top to bottom to enclose and protect the text on the upper page; then folded horizontally left to right, making the edges meet for sealing.



In the above pictured format, you pierce a hole near the centre edge using a heavy needle or awl; pass floss/thread around the letter and side going through the hole; then tie it off and seal with wax on one or both sides. A simpler variant has a horizontal fold from left and an overlapping one from right tucking one inside the other. The edges can then be sealed together with wax.

The Writing of Parts

Before we take in hand the instruments wherewith to write an epistle or letter, we haue to consider these pointes following: to wit, the estate, dignite, or qualite of hym unto whom we write: whether he bee a publike person, or a priuat, whither he be rich or poore, a friend or an enemie: also whither he bee well known unto vs, or but little.

Fulwood, Enemie of Idleness

Salutatio (the opening; starts the text body)

My dear heart, swete harte,
Right worshipful Lady
Honourable/good/noble lord
Right welbeloued frinde, I greet you well
To my gode lover [can mean good friend]
Unto the right worshipful & full singuler
gode lord

Right trusty and welbeloued I commend me
humbly unto you
Souveraine Lorde, yn as humble wise as any
true liege man can thinke or devise
Of Alle erthele Princes Our most dred soureigne
liege Lord and noblest Kyng
Most Gratius Soureigne.
...and Erasmus taking the mickey:
To the most perspicacious lord, golden
candlestick of the seven liberal arts, shining
peak of thinkers, ever gleaming lantern of
prowess etc

Narratio

By your most humble & obedient servant
with moch worchyppe
So praying for your health, and the increas of
your happynes I end

I thank you/thee for...
[NB you=formal; thee=intimate]
Desirous to shew my selfe thankfull.
I am become a great debtor vnto you goodnessse.
Acknowledging my selfe deeply bounde vnto you
for manye sundry fauours.
I hope I may render some recompense vnto the
benefites from you receyued.

I thank you heretyle of the grete besiness that ye do
for me and for the realme.
By our faithful witnessse, the vertues whiche are in
you should be knowne vnto all men
Hauing sundry tymes receiued benefits from your
honour, I thank thee well.

If I should take vpon me to thanke you, all my
wordes would not be able to suffice that which
my heart willeth & desireth.

Conclusio

(endings)

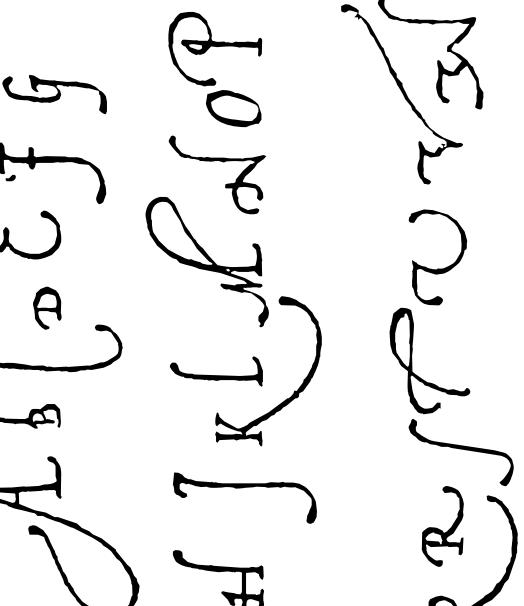
To the right Noble & singular good Lord
To my very louing frend, S^r [initials] knight
To my good lady [name] be thys deluyerd
To the right honori my singuler good Lady
To the moste noble and towardly young
gentleman [name] of [place]
To my verye good ladye [name] geffe thy
To the worshipfull his especiall good Maister
[name]
To the Quenes most excellent Maiestie

Wishing your healthe and prosperitie euen as
mine owne. &c.
My heartie commendations vnto you remembred.
Reioycing not a little at the health of you and all
other our friendes
Whose regarde stretcheth vnto your worship more
then vnto any others.

Superscription (addressee, on the outside)

*...the letter being closed, sealed and packed vp after
the finest fashion, whereupon must be written his
name to whome the letters shold be addressed, & his
dwelling place, (if it be not notoriously knowne)
placing therewith the name of his dignitie, Lordship,
Office, Nobilitie, or Parentage*

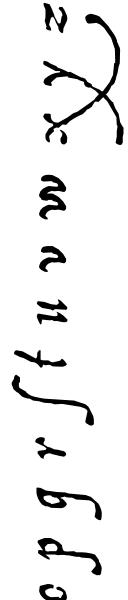
General Conventions

- Use an ordinary s at the end, otherwise long s: / ; join top to following h, t: 
- Generally v at the start, u otherwise (eg vnto = unto; euer = ever)
- i replaces j (eg iuell = jewell; Maiestie)
- i and y can be interchangeable (eg myne = mine)
- i and a j terminal are used in Roman numbers (eg iij = 3; xxvij=27)
- I is the capital for J (eg James = James)
- superscript abbreviations (eg w^rth = with)
- double the lls (eg faythfull, littyll, humbill)
- add e at the end (eg frende = friend)
- use a macron to indicate a dropped n (eg demād = demand)
- / = a full stop or change of thought
- no apostrophes, few paragraphs

Example text from BessoHardwick.org:

*...may yt please yow to undearstand that m' wyngfeld
hath delevered yow veneson to the quenes magsty w'
my lords most humbill comendacions (1096)*

*...I harde nott from you offe All this tymē tyll now
whyche drove me in dumpes but now Reynved Agen
by your wryteng onto me (L065)*



Ludovicos, a free font based on the 16th century humanist cursive hand and italic type of Papal scribe and writing-master Ludovico Vicentino degli Arrighi.

Dating/Location

- (generally at the end of the letter, often within the text body)
- from the courte this munday at noone the xxth of Januari
 - And so fare you well. Sheffield the xvijth of January
 - this present ffyday late at nyghte. the xiijth of february
 - at nonsuch wensday this xxijith of marche
 - Sunday. xijth of apryll
 - Shefelde tuesday mornyng being the xvij of maye
 - /from Hardwyck the second of June
 - July xv/[year]
 - / ydes xj off Awgust
 - I wyll sease troblynge you with my crebelynge frome my poore howse at Chattyworthe the laste of September. [year].
 - And so I take my leave, from London the xiijth of October.
 - god kepe your honour well 7th nouembr.
 - at sheffeld this xixth of desember

Other Dating Formats

Saints Days: Feast Days, Eve of, Translation of Nones and Ides: 5/13 or 7/11 day of the month May 1 2020-April 30 2021 = Anno Societatis 55 In the Reign of King [name] & Queen [name] (L071)

Ryght honourable & myne especial good
Lordconsort I commend me unto you at this
tyme & wylle be yow welle in yor endeavours
and all good heath Know that my tongue my
yer & my heart are all your servants and when
you cannot hear me through distanc you must
see me in my letters written at the Hermitage
the Eve of st vitale by yr affurd frende

Katherina

To the right worshipfull
& my vereye good frnde
J^r Radbot at Southron
Gaard this be delivred

This is the outer page used for addressing and protection.
If your letter runs long, tuck another bifolium inside; this page will then become page 8.

FOLD 2:
top folds
down to
centrefold

- After FOLD 5,
make a hole.
Pass 60cm of
floss through
the hole, around
the top, bottom
and edge. Seal
with wax.



Subscription
*Delivery instructions: name,
title, address, commands,
drawings of gallows*

FOLD 1: to make bifolium.
Fold sheet in half to make this
page 1 on top

*Salutatio which runs into the narrative main part
of the letter ending with the conclusio.....*

*Set out your letter with a wide left-hand margin
and narrow right one. The text runs on without
paragraph breaks.*

FOLD 4:

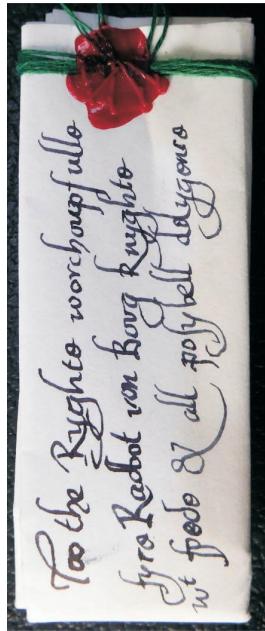
Before writing, do FOLD 1.
centrefold up
Almost all personal letters
were bifolia, with one sheet folded to make four
pages. After FOLD 1 this becomes
page 1 of 4 (eg A3 folds in half to A4 portrait)

Date and location

Here or at end of the letter text

FOLD 3:
bottom folds up
to centrefold 4

katherine kerr:
<http://webcentre.co.nz/kk>
Inspired by Jana Dambrogio
and Daniel Starza Smith
<http://letterlocking.org>



signature or sign
*If writing to an equal/inferior,
sign close to the body of text.
If writing to a superior, sign at
the bottom of the page.*