

Amy Lynn Green's Official Guide to (H)(A)(P)(P)(Y) (M)(A)(I)(L)



To research my 1940s epistolary novel, *Things We Didn't Say*, I read dozens of WWII-era letters from the homefront and the front lines. It was touching to see the back-and-forth of family news, dramatic storytelling, well-wishes, and records of daily life.

For years, it's been my mission to bring letter-writing into the 21st century. Here are some of my favorite ideas to make letter-writing practical. . . and hopefully fun, too!

General Pep Talk

You can do it! I promise. Writing letters can feel daunting, but that's just because we have an idea that snail mail is meant only for long, detailed letters exchanged for years with a pen pal.

When really...it's just about taking ten or fifteen minutes to make someone feel special. Think about the thrill you get when you see a non-bill, non-advertisement letter on an average Tuesday in your mailbox. Knowing someone took the time to think of you, jot a note, and stick a stamp on it can be very meaningful. So to take the intimidation out of letter-writing...

- **Keep supplies on hand.** Especially stamps. Nothing creates a delay like remembering to get stamps. But also, addresses, envelopes, and a few pretty cards or papers. (Okay, I will admit to having too many, but they'll all get sent eventually, right?)
- **Remember to keep it short.** Even a paragraph or two can be fun, sincere, and to the point. No need to give a full, Christmas-letter-type life update in every bit of mail.
- **Send letters on impulse.** It's easy to think, "That's silly," "What if they feel pressure to write back?" or "I don't know what to say." But I've heard back from so many recipients that I now know it's always worth following through.

Types of Happy Mail

Repurpose a Comic Strip: A solid-colored card (you can buy packs of them at craft stores) can be dressed up with panels from the funny pages.

Change the Card Occasion: I have a friend who never has the correct card on hand. . . so she gets out a Sharpie and makes the greetings work. My birthday card, once a baby shower card, read: "Showering you with blessings—on your birthday!" [Baby buggy labeled, "Amy" with an arrow] And inside: "Congratulations on the birth of your ~~child~~." I loved it!

Mail a Semi-Flat Item: The post office should mail any item 12 oz or less with proper postage and clear labeling. I've successfully mailed an oversized candy bar, colored pencil set (be sure to tape the box shut) and a Frisbee, attaching the mailing labels with packing tape and sticking the stamps right to the surface.



Collect Postcards: One of the ways to make mail more accessible is keeping a stock of pretty or unique postcards on hand. The stamps are cheaper, and the smaller space can help if you're struggling to know what to say. I've got a box of Pixar art postcards, but you can collect postcards from places where you vacation.

Add Some Color with Paint Chips: Want some fun stationary? Try taking a few paint chips, writing a message down them, and fitting them in a business envelope. Figure out the recipient's favorite color for some extra fun. (As a bonus, you'll be amused by the number of names you can give to shades of beige.)

Go with a Thanksgiving Card: Every year, I write short notes to a half dozen people thanking them for something specific from that year. If you have kids, they can join in too.

Leave a Ransom Note: A blank card can be made into a card for any occasion with letters cut out from magazines. A short message usually works best, but you could go longer if you have the dedication. (Should I admit how many of these I have actually sent as ransom notes for various people/items? Probably not.)

Write on an Unusual Item: I've been known to commandeer paper doilies, an old map, the front of a cereal box, and a number of other odd papers for a makeshift stationary. It's especially fun when the recipient has some kind of personal connection with the item.

Send Flower Seeds: In Victorian times, girls would arrange bouquets to send messages to people. Different flowers corresponded to different personality or character traits they admired. You can do the same thing by sending a packet of seeds in an envelope with a note explaining what the flower means and why it made you think of that person. Here are a few common kinds of flowers and their meanings:

Black-Eyed Susan: Encouragement
Crocus: Cheerfulness
Dahlia: Elegance
Daisy: Innocence and loyalty
Delphinium: Boldness
Violet: Faithfulness
Zinnia: Thinking of you



Enclose a Flat Gift: No need to pay high postage costs to give a little gift...just slip in a small item into an envelope. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Bookmark (magnetic ones are fun too)
- Tea bag
- Stickers
- Newspaper or magazine clipping
- Paper doll
- Candid photos
- Favorite recipe
- Page from a one-a-day calendar
- Crossword or Sudoku puzzle
- Pretty leaf or dried flower
- Balloon
- Confetti (not glitter, no one wants to clean that mess up)



P.S.

Just remember, the power of the letter comes from the heart behind it. Even if you mail a regular lined paper with a few “thinking of you” lines scrawled in pencil, that will still communicate thoughtfulness.

Have fun, try something new, fall in love with adorable stamps like I have...but know that the point of happy mail is showing the recipient that you care.