

# Epistolary

## Definition of Epistolary

Epistolary comes from a Greek word, *epistolē*, which means “letter.” Epistolary is a literary [genre](#) pertaining to letters, in which writers use letters, journals, and diary entries in their works, or they tell their stories or deliver messages through a series of letters. Though the usual format of epistolary is letters, writers sometimes use other forms of document such as newspaper clippings and diary entries. Recently, writers also use electronic documents like emails, blogs, radio broadcast, and recordings.

## Examples of Epistolary in Literature

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### Example #1: *The Color Purple* (By Alice Walker)

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Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*, is a good example of an epistolary novel in which an impoverished black teenage girl, Celie, tells her story through writing letters to both her sister and God. Here, readers can learn about the difficult life of Celie through her words and the direct experiences she has faced. Alice Walker has chosen to let the readers encounter this story by using Celie’s [voice](#), providing Celie a power that she could not have in everyday life. However, in the film adaptation of this novel, these letters echoed through the monologues of characters.

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### Example #2: *Frankenstein* (By Mary Shelley)

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Mary Shelley started her first novel, *Frankenstein*, in the form of letters. She uses three narratives or perspectives that allow readers to form opinions about the [narrative](#). The first narrator is Robert Walton, who gives his [point of view](#) about Victor. Robert records the confessions and narrative of Victor when he is dying. The second narrator is Victor himself, who gives

his point of view about Walton. Finally, the creature disrupts Victor and readers get its viewpoint. It is Walton who starts and ends this novel by relating a series of events through letters to his sister, creating [suspense](#) by using the word “demon.” The letters of Victor and the monster’s [perspective](#) on the other hand, give frames to the main body of the narrative.

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### **Example #3: *Dracula* (By Bram Stoker)**

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Bram Stoker has employed epistolary format in his successful and widely recognized novel nineteenth century, *Dracula*. The author has compiled the entire novel in the form of letters, newspaper clippings, diary entries, doctor’s notes, telegrams, and ship’s logs. The narrators of this novel are protagonists, who supplement it with newspaper clippings to relate different events. Although this novel draws on letters form, it reduces the end of the narrative.

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### **Example #4: *Pamela* (By Samuel Richardson)**

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Samuel Richardson’ novel *Pamela* is another notable example of such novels in which you would find the device of epistolary. In this novel, Pamela attempts to run away from her lecherous master, Mr. B. Whenever her master tries to seduce her, she expresses her insecurities to impoverished parents by writing them letters. Mr. B., however, intercepts her letters, and gives her parents the wrong information by shifting her to another estate, and there she begins writing a journal, hoping that one day she would send it to her parents. By the end, Mrs. Jewkes finds letters written by Pamela, and gives them to Mr. B., who realizes Pamela’s pious [character](#), changes his mind, and decides to marry her.

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### **Example #5: *Diary of a Young Girl* (By Anne Frank)**

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A teenage girl, Anne Frank, wrote *Diary of a Young Girl*, recording her experiences during World War II. She recounts her feelings and thoughts, including some important and some trivial details. After a month while writing this diary, Anne along with her family members was forced into hiding in some building in Amsterdam to avoid religious persecution at the

hands of the Nazis. However, all of them died in 1944, except her father Otto Frank, who had her diary published in 1947. Anne Frank's diary format provides the readers an intimate insight into Anne's feelings and thoughts during tough times. It is also remarkable in that Anne describes her dreams and hopes through historical [context](#).

## **Function of Epistolary**

Epistolary form can add [realism](#) to a narrative, as it imitates real life workings. It is therefore able to describe different points of view. The primary function of this form of writing is to give readers an intimate view of characters' feelings and thoughts, and develop a direct connection with the events through letters without interference of the author. This technique thus makes the literary piece a real experience for the readers. Also, a presentation of events from different viewpoint gives the story [verisimilitude](#) and dimension.