



vol 1  
issue 4

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*"The important thing is to  
learn to set your own goals.  
When you reach them, be  
proud because they belong to  
you and nobody else."*

Sheila Greene, Adult Learner

# Writing Personal Letters

A personal or social letter is very different from a business letter. A personal letter is much warmer, and may be more casual. You can be funny, silly or express deep emotions. These pages will help you to express and communicate your personal thoughts more clearly. Choose from our models and practice writing letters.



## GETTING STARTED

- If you are writing an important personal letter, one in which you are sharing important thoughts or feelings, it is a good idea to write out a “practice letter” or rough draft, first.
- Wait a while, then look at what you have written. Cut out anything that doesn’t suit your purpose.
- Always reread your letters before sending them. Proofread for spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes.
- Think about the tone. Are you saying what you want—in just the right way?

A letter can be simple and friendly (*Dear Gina, We haven’t seen each other in quite a while and I was just thinking about you....*).

It can be bold and dramatic (*Gina!! You are NOT going to believe what happened to me today!!*).

It can express deep emotions (*Dear Gina, I was so sorry to hear about your grandmother’s death. Everyone will miss her.*).

Salutation

If you are handwriting a note, indent a few spaces from the left margin to begin each paragraph, or to change the subject.

Your address and the date.

555 East 114th Street  
New York, NY 10042  
May 1, 2003

Dear Gina,

Body of letter

*It has been months since we last spoke and I want to share some wonderful news with you. Bruce and I are getting married! It took him long enough to ask, but when he did, it was so romantic. Candles, flowers and soft music. Bruce even got down on his knees to propose.*

*Bruce and I hope that you will be able to come to our wedding. It’s on December 5, so hold the date. Bruce sends his best and we are both looking forward to having you share in our special day.*

Love,  
Debby

*P.S. Wait until you see my ring!*

If you forgot to add something, you can put in a P.S. (It comes from the Latin Post Scriptum, which means “after the writing.”)

Line up the closing with the date.



It can talk about people you know in common (*Dear Gina, I ran into Elaine Lewis today and we caught up on old times....*).

A personal letter lets you put in writing an issue that is on your mind or bothering you (*Dear Gina, I wanted to write to you about something that has been worrying me....*).

### SHOW YOU CARE ENOUGH

P.S. It's always thoughtful to add a few words of your own to a printed birthday or greeting card.

### FINE TUNE YOUR WRITING

Use the space to the right to write a draft of a letter to a friend. Don't forget to put in the date, and indent your paragraphs. Use our models to help you. After you've polished your draft, mail the letter.

### ADD TO YOUR PORTFOLIO

On a separate sheet of paper, write a personal letter. Save it as a writing sample. Or make a copy of it, **save one for your portfolio** and send the original to the person to whom you are writing to.

Sometimes it can be helpful to put your deepest thoughts, feelings or worries into a letter.

Write your address on the upper right hand side of the page.

1212 Villa Way  
Los Angeles, CA 90512  
May 1, 2003

Dear Luis,

I've been thinking about changing my job and my career for sometime, and I wanted to write my thoughts down on paper. You've always been such a good friend, that I'd like to share my ideas with you. Perhaps you can help me figure this out. Even if you can't, this letter will help me to sort out my feelings about leaving my job at Otter Enterprises and perhaps moving to a new state. So here goes...

address

date

salutation or greeting

# Develop a Reading Routine

No two readers are alike. Everyone develops an individual reading style and routine. Here are some exercises to help you fine tune your personal routine. Read the passages below and try out the strategies suggested. If they work for you, make them part of your reading routine.



## Get involved with what you are reading.

We mean **really** involved. Take these actions as you read. You'll remember the piece much better.

- Use a pencil or a highlighter to mark the parts that you like or the parts that you don't understand. (You would not do this in a library book, of course.)
- Write notes or comments in the margins. For example: "I love this part." "What?" "No way!" "This reminds me of the way my mother used to cook." (Use Post-its for library books.)
- In a reading log or a notebook, copy down the parts that you like or the parts that you don't understand.
- Mark a page that has the information you need with a bookmark or Post-it note.

*Read this!*

Tita couldn't take her eyes from her mother's face during the wake. Only now, after her death, she saw her as she was for the first time and began to understand her. Anyone looking at Tita could easily have mistaken this look of recognition for a look of sorrow, but she didn't feel any sorrow. Now she finally understood the meaning of the expression "fresh as a head of lettuce"—that's the odd, detached way a lettuce should feel at being separated abruptly from another lettuce with which it had grown up.

*I love this part*

The passages on these two pages are from  
**Like Water for Chocolate**  
 by Laura Esquivel.  
 There's more from her book  
 on page 6.

Now you try it with  
this selection from  
*Like Water for  
Chocolate*.



When she found out she was pregnant, Mama Elena had planned to run away with José. But while she was waiting for him to appear that night, hidden in the darkness of the balcony, who should appear out of the shadows but an unknown man who attacked José for no apparent reason, eliminating him from the world. After that terrible grief, Mama Elena resigned herself to life with her legal husband. Though for many years Juan De la Garza had been unaware of the entire story, he had learned of it just when Tita was born. He had gone to a bar to celebrate the birth of his new daughter with some friends; there a venomous tongue had let out the information. The terrible news brought on a heart attack. That was all there was.



## ASK yourself

During and after reading, ask yourself these questions to see if you have a basic understanding of what you are reading.

- Who is this about?
- What is this about?
- What is happening?
- Where and when is this happening?

If it is a story, try these questions on for size.

- What do I think of the characters?
- How do I feel about what I am reading?
- Does this remind me of anything in my own life?
- Is this how I thought it would turn out?

If you are reading history, science or stories in the news and want to find something out, these questions might help.

- What information is new to me?
- What are the important points here?
- Are my questions being answered?
- Who is this about?
- Why did these events take place?



# Like Water for Chocolate

by Laura Esquivel

**Like Water for Chocolate**, by Laura Esquivel, has been called a story of “love, sex, war, and the sweep of Mexican history.” It has also been described as a “tall tale, Mexican cookbook, and home-remedy handbook all rolled into one.”

This is an excerpt from the book. If you would like to read the entire novel, ask for it at your local library or bookstore. The book has also been turned into a movie. If you’d like to see it, check it out at your local video store.

J A N U A R Y

## P R E P A R A T I O N :

**T**ake care to chop the onion fine. To keep from crying when you chop it (which is so annoying!), I suggest you place a little bit on your head. The trouble with crying over an onion is that once the chopping gets you started and the tears begin to well up, the next thing you know you just can’t stop. I don’t know whether that’s ever happened to you, but I have to confess it’s happened to me, many times. Mama used to say it was because I was especially sensitive to onions, like my great-aunt, Tita.

Tita was so sensitive to onions, any time they were being chopped, they say she would just cry and cry; when she was still in my great-grandmother’s belly her sobs were so loud that even Nacha, the cook, who was half-deaf, could hear them easily. Once her wailing got so violent that it brought on an early labor. And before my great-grandmother could let out a word or even a whimper, Tita made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves, and cilantro, steamed milk, garlic, and of course, onion. Tita had no need for the usual slap on the bottom, because she was already crying as she emerged; maybe that was because she knew then it would be her lot in life to be denied marriage. The way Nacha told it, Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor.

That afternoon, when the uproar had subsided and the water had been dried up by the sun, Nacha swept up the residue the tears had left on the red stone floor. There was enough salt to fill a ten-pound sack—it was used for cooking and lasted a long time. Thanks to her unusual birth, Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen, where she spent most of her life from the day she was born.





When she was only two days old, Tita's father, my great-grandfather, died of a heart attack and Mama Elena's milk dried up from the shock. Since there was no such thing as powdered milk in those days, and they couldn't find a wet nurse anywhere, they were in a panic to satisfy the infant's hunger. Nacha, who knew everything about cooking—and much more that doesn't enter the picture until later—offered to take charge of feeding Tita. She felt she had the best chance of “educating the innocent child's stomach,” even though she had never married or had children. Though she didn't know how to read or write, when it came to cooking she knew everything there was to know. Mama Elena accepted her offer gracefully; she had enough to do between her mourning and the enormous responsibility of running the ranch—and it was the ranch that would provide her children the food and education they deserved—without having to worry about feeding a newborn baby on top of everything else.

From that day on, Tita's domain was the kitchen, where she grew vigorous and healthy on a diet of teas and thin corn gruels. This explains the sixth sense Tita developed about everything concerning food. Her eating habits, for example, were attuned to the kitchen routine: in the morning, when she could smell that the beans were ready; at midday, when she sensed the water was ready for plucking the chickens; and in the afternoon, when the dinner bread was baking, Tita knew it was time for her to be fed.

Sometimes she would cry for no reason at all, like when Nacha chopped onions, but since they both knew the cause of those tears, they didn't pay them much mind. They made them a source of entertainment, so that during her childhood Tita didn't distinguish between tears of laughter and tears of sorrow. For her laughing was a form of crying.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Esquivel began her writing career as a screenwriter. Her book, *Like Water for Chocolate*, was turned into a highly popular movie. Laura Esquivel lives in Mexico.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**1** On a separate piece of paper, write a three sentence summary of the story. What did you like? Would you like to read the book?

**2** Check your understanding of the story by answering these questions.

1. What is the name of the cook? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who is Tita? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Why does Tita have a “sixth sense” about everything concerning food?

4. What part of the house was Tita's realm?

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWERS:** 1. Nacha; 2. The baby, and the author's great-aunt; 3. Tita grew up in the kitchen and around food; 4. the kitchen.



# Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

## Paging Through the Newspaper

Newspapers are valuable learning and research tools, whether you want to keep up with current events or find out what's on sale at your local market. A paper can improve your reading skills. And it can give you ideas for good writing because newspaper articles have a lot of details in a limited space. See what we mean on these pages.



## USING A NEWSPAPER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Newspapers have more information than most readers have time to read. That's why the table of contents, which is usually on one of the first three pages, is so helpful. It tells the reader what's in the paper and where to find it. Each newspaper may have a slightly different type of table of contents. But they all look something like the one on the right.

## FAST FINDS

Most papers have different sections. The letter (A–E) indicates the section, and the page numbers follow.

If you are looking for stock quotes in this paper, turn to the D section (business). Find news about the latest style in clothes in the B section on page 10 (fashion).

1. Where would you turn to find sports scores? \_\_\_\_
2. The latest findings about cholesterol? \_\_\_\_
3. Current events about Europe? \_\_\_\_
4. Who is appearing on Oprah's TV show? \_\_\_\_
5. Where to find a job? \_\_\_\_

### INSIDE TODAY'S PAPER

Arts.....	E1-10
Business Day .....	D1-25
Editorial, Letters.....	A20
International .....	A3
Metropolitan .....	B1-8
National .....	A12-19
Sports .....	C1-7
Fashion.....	B10
Obituaries .....	B11
Health.....	E11
Weather.....	C8
Classified/Job Ads .....	B11-15
Auto Exchange .....	C8-9
Comics.....	D26
TV Listings .....	C10

## TAKING APART A NEWS STORY

Most news stories have a **headline** which tells you what the story is about. Headlines also make it possible to scan the paper to find stories you want to read. And they serve as a summary of the news.

Here are two typical headlines. Just by looking at them, you can tell what's going on in the world:

**President Visits China**

**New Cancer Drug Approved**



#### HEADLINE

## TRAIN IN GERMANY CRASHES

**DECK**  
gives  
a bit more  
information

### Toll Reaches 96

**BYLINE**  
who wrote  
the story

By Hadley Ward

ESCHEDE, Germany, June 5  
—A high-speed train traveling at 125 miles an hour from Munich to Hamburg slammed into a steel-reinforced overpass near this northern German town. At least 96 people are feared dead. It was the worst train disaster in Germany in over 50 years.

#### LEAD

The first paragraph answers the questions: who? what? when? where? why?

### TAKE THE LEAD

Based on the lead paragraph you just read, answer the following questions.

1. Who or what is the story about?

2. When did the story take place?

3. Where did the story take place?

4. Why do you think this story is in the news?

5. How did the accident happen?

### EDITORIALS

All newspapers have an editorial page—the place where the editors of the paper give their opinions about news events. Editorials can help readers form opinions about events and issues. Not all readers agree with an editorial, however. On the right is the beginning of an editorial.

1. What is the editorial about?

2. Do you agree or disagree with the editorial? Why?

### WRITE YOUR OPINION

Buy a newspaper and read a couple of articles. Summarize them on a sheet of paper.

Next, write an “editorial” in which you express your opinions about something. It could be an event in the news, a law that you would like changed, or a situation you think is unfair. Explain why you feel as you do.

## PASS STRONGER GUN CONTROL LAWS

In the last three months, three young students have stolen guns and killed teachers and classmates. These killings would not have happened if tougher gun control laws were in place. We believe that laws must be passed to require all guns to be locked up. All ammunition must be kept separate from guns and also locked away. And all assault weapons must be made illegal.

Save your summaries  
and your editorial for  
**YOUR PORTFOLIO.**

**ANSWERS:** *Fast Finds:* 1. Section C, pages 1-7; 2. Section E, page 11; 3. Section A, page 3; 4. Section C, page 10; 5. Section B, pages 11-15. *Take the Lead:* 1. high-speed train crash; 2. June 5; 3. Germany; 4. worst train accident in 50 years, a lot of people killed; 5. train slammed into an overpass.



# Transitions

A transition is a change, a move from one thing to another. In general, a transition means any serious change. For example, someone who is changing careers is in transition between jobs. In writing, transitions are words or phrases that connect ideas or make it possible to smoothly move from one idea to another. Transitions make writing smoother and clearer.

Here is a poem by Stephen Colman about transitions.

## T R A N S I T I O N S

A transition's like a bridge  
From the past into the present  
Or a word that connects points  
In a paragraph or a sentence.  
In other words  
It's the glue  
That holds a poem together—  
It's a **therefore** and a **then**  
A **likewise** and **however**.  
**For example**  
I think **therefore** I am  
**Likewise** I write because I can.  
I get ideas for things to say  
**then** grab a pen—sometimes a crayon.  
**Also** transitions help create  
A certain flow  
between two clauses.  
**Likewise** they link ideas and thoughts  
Without unnecessary pauses.  
So next time you feel stuck  
Like it's impossible to type  
It might be a transition that you need  
To make your writing tight.



## HERE IS WHAT WE MEAN:

### Try It

I liked the job **because** it was challenging.  
I liked the job **even though** it was challenging.

**"Because"** and **"even though"** are the transitions in the sentences above. They give the sentences different meanings. What is the difference between the two sentences?

What does the first sentence mean to you?

---



---

What does the second sentence mean to you?

---



---

## FINE TUNE YOUR WRITING

You can use the following words to join together sentences or ideas within a sentence to make your writing smoother. **Write two sentences using these transitions. If you need more space, use a separate piece of paper.**

and	until
so	therefore
then	since
because	but
even though	however

---



---



---



---



## MEET

## Sheila Greene

For this travel agent,  
learning to concentrate  
was the ticket to success.

As soon as Sheila Greene started to take a test or read a book in class, she couldn't concentrate. She heard the ticking of the wall clock. She checked out the impossibly thick book a student next to her was reading. Sheila eyed the guy who, she was certain, would ace the reading quiz, without breaking into a sweat. She would do just about anything other than focus on her reading.

Sheila recalls, **"I could read. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that I couldn't remember WHAT I had read."**

Sheila became distracted because she compared herself with everyone around her. This became a huge obstacle to her learning. Sheila wanted to become a travel agent. To do this, she had to improve her reading skills from an eighth-grade reading level. To keep her focused on the page, Sheila's tutor gave her African-American stories. "I could relate to those stories. They were interesting," Sheila says. Her mind didn't wander and gradually her reading got better and better.

## WORD TRICKS

Little tricks helped Sheila, too. **"When I found a word I didn't know, I'd circle it and look it up,"** she explains. "I would also look at the words around the unknown word, and that was always useful in helping me figure it out."

When it came time to take the travel agent test, Sheila focused on each line on the page. She never looked up. Sheila warns: "Don't pay attention to the people around you." Her concentration strategy worked! Sheila passed. She became a travel agent and went on to become one of the five top sales agents at her company.

Sheila Greene learned her lessons well. Now she teaches her children to focus on what they are achieving, not what the person next door did. The important thing is to learn to set your own goals. When you reach them, be proud because they belong to you and nobody else.

## FINE-TUNE YOUR WRITING

One of Sheila Greene's goals was to learn to concentrate better. Another was to become a travel agent. Write about a personal goal you have. Why is this your goal? What steps will you take to achieve it? How do you think you will feel once you have accomplished it?

Save your work for **YOUR PORTFOLIO**.



# KEEPING TRACK

Use this check list to keep track of the work you did in this issue. Check off everything that you completed.

If you finished Workbook 4, this is what you have done:	Completed ✓
<input type="checkbox"/> Read about personal letters <input type="checkbox"/> Wrote a personal letter	
<input type="checkbox"/> Underlined, made notes and asked questions about a reading passage	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read the passage from <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Answered the comprehension questions <input type="checkbox"/> Wrote about a childhood memory	
<input type="checkbox"/> Answered questions about the newspaper	
<input type="checkbox"/> Practiced reading a real newspaper	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read the poem about transitions <input type="checkbox"/> Answered questions about transitions	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read the profile of Sheila Greene <input type="checkbox"/> Wrote an essay about a personal goal	

## TUNE IN TO LEARNING WITH



ALMA, the Adult Literacy Media Alliance, is delighted to present TV411™—a series of entertaining and educational videos and print materials to help you improve your reading, writing and math skills. The series helps you cope with everyday problems and situations, from money and health matters to family and parenting concerns. TV411 is filled with valuable tips, interesting information and useful hands-on practice to help you prepare for a GED course or a college or technical course.

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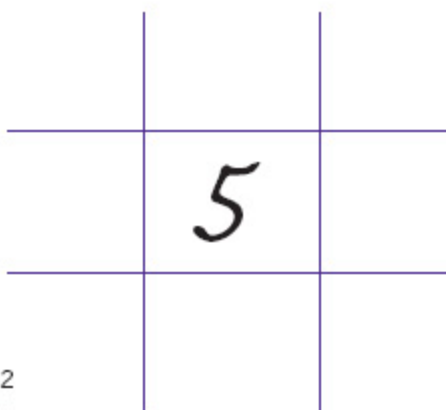
Or call us at our toll-free number: 1-800-304-1922

### Visit Our Web Site

Visit our Web site and send us e-mail at [www.tv411.org](http://www.tv411.org)

## WE'VE GOT YOUR NUMBER...

And it's 15. Using the numbers 1–9, fill in the grid so that all rows across, down, and diagonally add up to 15. You can use each number only once. We've put in one number to get you started.



Answer:

4 9 2  
3 5 7  
8 1 6

## BUZZWORD

### Convey

To send, to communicate.

"The man asked the girl to convey his greetings to her family."

You might want to enter **CONVEY** in your personal dictionary.  
Use it in a sentence.



Don't lose  
Your head  
To gain a minute.  
You need your head:  
Your brains are in it.



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