

The Mass-Observation Project

Summer 2004 Directive

This directive is about written communication: your correspondents, the way you write different letters and your use of pens, paper, post, computers and email. If you never write letters, you might like to talk about receiving letters. If you neither write them nor receive them (including emails), you may still like to comment on people who do, or the practices of your family, friends and work mates.

Part 1: Letters

What you do now

List the kind of letters you **send** in an average month. Do they fall into different categories? What categories are they? Please include letters written at work and at home.

Take some time to describe what you feel about sending and receiving letters.

What rewards are there? How much is sending letters an obligation?

How you write

How do you write your letters (and does this vary?)?

- By hand? (Describe your pens)
- With a typewriter? (Describe your typewriter)
- Word-processing? (Do you have a preferred format?)
- Do you add drawings, photographs, cuttings or enclose extras?
- Do you have special layout? eg do you include your address?
- How do you address the person you are writing to? Do you use "Dear....."
- How do you finish? (How do you sign off? How do you decide what to say?)
- What sort of paper do you prefer and does this vary depending on the letter?
- Do you use address stickers or have your address printed on your letter paper?
- Do you keep copies?
- Do you share the letters you send with other people? Who else reads them?

Where and when you write

Where and when do you do you write your letters?

Is it different for different kinds of letters?

As usual, please start all three parts of your reply on a new sheet of paper with your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

How often do you write letters and how much time do you spend on them? Does this vary depending on whom they are to?

Are you aware of censoring your own letters to some people? Can you describe?

Receiving letters

List the kinds of letters you **receive** in an average month, and categorise them if you can.

Looking at the questions above about your own letter-writing habits, can you describe how other people write to you?

How long do you leave it before replying to the letters you receive?

Do you share the letters you receive with other people?

A MEMORABLE LETTER?

Have you ever received a really memorable letter? What was it? Why was it significant?

Write, speak or phone?

How do you decide which to use when? Give some examples.

Has there ever been a time when you decided to write a letter rather than talk to someone?

Postcard, letter card or letter?

How do you decide what to use? Do you write differently on a postcard? What about letter cards? How do you choose the images? What's your preference?

Formal letters and handwriting

Invitations, letters of sympathy, announcements of celebratory or commemorative events: any comments? I recently received an invitation from relatives in the USA which has been written by hand in italic script by a calligrapher. Is this an American tradition or is it familiar to you? Do you sometimes ask people with "nice handwriting" to do writing for you for special occasions?

Circular or standard letters (round robins?)

By this I mean those newsy letters that are produced, often at Christmas or New Year, to be circulated to family and friends. Do you write and/or receive them? What's your opinion of them?

Letter clubs

Have you, or anyone you know, taken part in a letter club where letters are circulated to a specific group of people? Please describe.

Pen pals

Do you write to people as a "pen pal"? Please describe the correspondence if you do.

Letter-writing as a political or charitable activity?

Do you ever write to people for these reasons eg to prisoners or to people in exile. Again, please give as much detail as possible.

Do you ever write to newspapers or radio or TV? On what issues? Have you ever had a letter published?

Do you write to politicians? Please describe, and also any results.

What about letters of complaint? If you have done this, did it produce the effect you hoped for?

Love letters

What counts as a love letter? Have you ever written or received one? Did you keep any received? Tell us about them.

Abusive or nuisance letters

Have you ever received an abusive letter? Have you ever sent one? Please give details. Is much of what you receive junk mail? If so, how do you deal with it?

Storing letters

Do you keep copies of the letters you write? Do you have a filing system (please describe if you do)?

(Again please include letters written at work if it is relevant)

Do you keep the letters you receive? If you do, how long for? And how do you file them?

Reading letters

Do you enjoy reading published letters? If you do, please say why. Give any examples you can think of

The past

How has your letter-writing changed over the years? How does this compare with the experiences of the people you know?

Were you taught how to write letters at school? Or at an adult class? If so, what were the rules?

The postal service

Any comments? Are you affected by the recently announced changes in the postal service?

The next section is about email. You may never use email, but it would be helpful if you commented on its use generally and whether you could imagine using it in the future.

Part 2: Email

Please feel free to reply at length and to add any further comments or add themes we have not suggested but which you think are relevant.

If you use email, please take time here to describe how you use it, at work and at home.

When did you first start using email?

Do you also use the Internet? At home? At work? Elsewhere?

How do you use email today? Please describe what accounts you have, what kinds of purposes you use email for, whom you communicate with.

Do you subscribe to any email discussions lists? For work? For personal interest?

Letters and emails

Do you write emails instead of letters or as well as letters? What do you think the differences are between the two?

How quickly do you reply to the emails you receive?

How private is your email? More private than letters?

What your emails look like

How "correct" are your emails? Do you use a spell check for example?

How do you format your emails and does this vary?

Do you use forms of address and signing off, as in letters eg "Dear.." and "Yours...."

Do you use emoticons? Capital letters? Lower case letters? Abbreviations? (please give examples)

Storing and filing

Do you have a system for filing your email (those you send and those you receive)? Do you print everything out, for example, and file it?

Rewards and problems

Are there rewards to using email? What are the problems (if any)?

Have you ever sent an email to the wrong person? Or replied too quickly to an email?

Do you receive much spam and if you do, how do you handle it?

Texting/phones

When do you send an email and when do you phone?

Do you send text messages from your phone and how does this compare with using email?

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