Writing to Imagine: Spy School/Town Planning

How to Write a Formal Letter

You write formal letters to people you don't know or to organisations, for example, newspapers or businesses.

1. A letter addressed Dear Madam
2. Put your address in the top right hand corner of the page.
3. Put the date underneath the address.
4. If you don't know the person's name, start the letter with Dear Sir, Dear Madam, or Dear Sir or Madam and finish with Yours faithfully.
5. If you do know the person's name, start the letter Dear Mr/Mrs (put the person's surname here) and finish with Yours sincerely.
6. Always use clear, simple English. Start by saying why you are writing then follow with the details. It's a good idea to list the points you want to make before you start writing.

Finish by saying what you would like to happen next, for example, I hope to hear from you soon.

How to Write a Story

Planning: A well planned story has a plot that develops from setting the scene at the beginning, through the action in the middle, and to the end where you tell your reader what happens to the characters, clear up any mysteries and tie up any loose ends. Remember, it's fine to make rough, scribbled notes when planning (as long as you can read them!) but always use neat, clear writing when it comes to writing the story itself.

Structure: The first thing to remember is that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. A story has to be in the right order or your readers won't understand it. The beginning of a story is where you introduce your readers to your style, setting and characters. Often a writer will give his characters a problem to solve. This keeps the reader interested, as they'll want to find out what happens. In the middle you develop your story. The reader begins to ask more questions and starts to learn what will happen to the characters. In the end you tell readers exactly what happens to the characters and how they solved the problems you gave them at the start.

Style: It's important to get your style right from the beginning. It will help the reader get the feel of your story.

You should use adjectives (words that describe nouns) and adverbs (words that describe verbs) to keep your readers interested. For example, if you are writing a ghost story choose dark, scary adjectives and adverbs to create a dark, scary atmosphere (feeling). You can also choose whether your story will have lots of characters, dialogue (people talking) and action, or long, slow descriptive pieces of writing - or all of those things!

Setting: The setting is the place and time your story is 'set'. Letting your readers know where and when your story is set will help bring the story to life. If the setting is somewhere your readers aren't familiar with then make sure you describe it in detail. Two stories can be set in exactly the same place, but feel completely different because of the words the writer chooses to use. Every story needs a setting.

Characters: List your characters and make a note of what they're like: What do they look like? What do they sound like? What sort of a person are they? Make sure you describe them to your reader and that you give them dialogue (things to say) that suits the sort of person they are.

Punctuation

Full stops (.), question (?) and exclamation marks (!)
Every sentence must end with a full stop, question or exclamation mark.
1. A full stop shows that you have finished a sentence, e.g. *This sentence ends with a full stop.*
2. A question mark is used to show when someone has asked a question, e.g. *Are we going on holiday next week?* (remember that question marks follow direct questions, but they should not be used to follow indirect questions).
3. An exclamation mark is used to show when something is surprising or forceful, e.g. *Ouch! That really hurt!* (remember that exclamation marks should be used sparingly, should <u>never</u> be used in formal writing, and you should <u>never</u> use two or more exclamation marks in a row).

Commas (,)

1. A comma creates a small interruption within a sentence to help clarify meaning, e.g. *After dinner, which was fish and chips, we went to the park.*
2. A comma must <u>never</u> be used to join two parts of a sentence which each make sense separately, *e.g. I went to the fair, I bought some candyfloss* – this is called a comma splice and is bad English! In this instance, instead of a comma, use a connective or a semi-colon, e.g. *I went to the fair where I bought some candyfloss*, or *I went to the fair; I bought some candyfloss.*
3. A comma is used between items in a list, e.g. *My favourite countries to visit are France, Italy and Spain.*
4. A comma is used before a speech mark, e.g. *I approached the shop keeper and asked, "Are these in the sale too?"*
5. A comma is used to create a slight pause and emphasis before a joining word such as "but", "however", "instead", e.g. *I opened the cupboard, but it was empty.*

Apostrophes (')
1. An apostrophe is used (often before "s") to show possession, e.g. *The book's cover.*
2. An apostrophe is used to show a missing letter, e.g. *hasn't, didn't.*
3. Remember "it's" means "it is", whereas "its" shows possession, e.g. *The dog chased its tail* (where the tail belongs to the dog).

Semi-colons (;)
1. A semi-colon replaces a full stop or "and" between two or more sentences that share a theme, e.g. *The supermarket was crowded; the queues lasted forever.*

Colons (:)
1. A colon is used at the end of a sentence to introduce a list, e.g. *There are many things I love about visiting London: the shops, the underground and the museums.*

Quotations marks ("")
1. Quotation marks are used to show spoken words. e.g. *I approached the shop keeper and asked, "Are these in the sale too?"*
2. Quotation marks are used around odd or unusual terms, jargon or slang, e.g. *My friend and I posed for a "selfie".*

Round brackets ()
1. Round brackets are used to insert important explanation or additional information within a sentence e.g. *My great-grandfather (who fought in WW2) owed three medals.*

Dashes (–)
1. Dashes are used to insert less important explanation or additional information, e.g. *My great-grandfather – who smoked a pipe – owed three medals* (remember that dashes are longer than hyphens).

Hyphens (-)
1. Hyphens are used between compound words, e.g. *no-one, co-operate* (remember that hyphens are shorter than dashes).