



Greetings from Far Away: Writing Informal Letters with V-Mail

OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the use, process, and historical context of Victory Mail (V-Mail) during World War II. Using V-mail as a basis, students will also learn about the elements of and how to write an informal letter. Students will practice their new letter writing skills using a V-Mail template.

OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Understand the history of V-Mail and its processes.
- Name and identify the five elements in an informal letter.
- Write an informal letter that includes the five elements.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **Victory Mail or V-Mail:** the primary form of secure mail between civilians and military personnel used by the United States government during WWII
- **Informal Letter:** a letter written to someone you know well, like a friend or family member
- **Heading:** located at the top, right of your letter, it includes the sender's line-by-line address followed by the date
- **Greeting:** the beginning of your letter
- **Body:** the main part of your letter that includes a clear topic
- **Closing:** the end of your letter
- **Signature:** your name either printed or signed

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

16 million Americans served in the military during WWII, many of which were stationed at overseas bases. Without the technology we have today, letter writing was a fundamental source of communication. Unfortunately, mail bags with letters to service men and women were very heavy and took up a lot of space in cargo planes traveling with other important supplies. In order to lighten the load, but still provide the essential need for soldiers to communicate with their loved ones, Victory Mail (V-Mail) was developed.

Letters were written on small pieces of paper (7 x 9 1/8 inches) and sent to the post office. What followed was a tedious, but necessary process! Letters were sent through censors, photographed, and saved as negatives using microfilm (a very small form of the original letter). These microfilm negatives could fit thousands of letters—the difference of hundreds of pounds being shipped overseas! Once they arrived at their processing facility overseas, the negatives would be developed and

SUBJECT ELA
History

GRADE LEVEL(S)
2nd-5th

DURATION

60-70 minutes; two lessons

MATERIALS

- Computer
- V-Mail Process Photo Slides (included below)
- Pen or Pencil
- Notebook or scratch paper
- Printed V-Mail worksheet (included below)
- Printed rubric (included below)

SET-UP

Traditional classroom or at-home set-up

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.5

With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.4

With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

printed into large sheets. The large sheets were cut into single V-Mail letters, placed in new envelopes, sorted, and distributed.

ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Introduction (5-10 mins): Ask students about letters: What is a letter? Have they written/received one? What is the difference between a hand-written letter and an e-mail? Explain to students that during WWII, hand-written letters were one of the primary forms of communication. Since 16 million Americans were enlisted in the military, many of them would write and receive letters that needed to be flown overseas. In order to “lighten the load”, **Victory Mail (V-Mail)** was developed. Use the PDF slides to show pictures and describe the V-Mail process.

Activity #1-V-Mail Process (10 mins): Using the photo slides as an aid, describe the V-Mail process to students.

It was more than just writing a letter and putting it in the mailbox! Letters were sent through a censor, photographed, and placed on microfilm negatives, then shipped (usually by air) to locations across the globe. Once they arrived on base, staff would develop and print the film onto large sheets of paper. Lastly, letters were cut, sorted, and delivered to service men and women. The photos shown were taken on a base in Papa New Guinea.

Activity #2-Elements of an Informal Letter (10-15 mins): Next, students will learn about and identify the essential elements in an informal letter using V-Mail as an example.

Most V-Mail letters were **informal letters**, meaning they were friendly letters written to people who knew each other well. Ask students to provide examples of who you might write informal letters to (best friend, brother, mom, grandpa, etc.). Every informal letter has **five elements**: the heading, the greeting, the body, the closing, and the signature.

The heading is located on the top right of the page and includes the sender’s name and address (street name, city, state, and zip code) followed by the date. **The greeting** is a friendly beginning to your letter. Ask students to provide examples of a greeting (Dear..., Hello, Hi, Greetings, etc.). **The body** is the main part of your letter. It should include at least three sentences on a clearly defined topic. **The closing** is the end of your letter. This is usually a way to say goodbye. Ask students to provide examples of a closing (talk to you later, keep in touch, with love, hugs and kisses, etc.). **The signature** is your name written or signed at the end of the letter. Remind students that you do not have to write your given name, sometimes the writer will use a nickname. Ask students to provide examples of a signature (Bob, Nancy, Mom, Dad, Pop Pop, Your Sweetheart, etc.).

Lastly, use the example V-Mail letter in the final slide from the V-Mail processing document to identify the five elements of an informal letter. Additional letters are provided if more practice is needed.

Activity #3-Writing V-Mail Using the Informal Letter Format (25-30 mins): Now that students know what V-Mail is and how to write an informal letter, they will write a V-Mail to a classmate. Allow students a notebook or scratch paper to draft their V-Mail letter. Only use the printed V-Mail worksheet when their letter is ready. Letters can be placed in a classroom mailbox or given directly to the teacher to “run through the mail censor” for assessment before delivering the letters to recipients.

Conclusion (5 mins): Tell students writing letters can be a fun form of communication, even with access to e-mail today. Before ending the lesson, show students an example of a V-Mail letter and choose an element of an informal letter for them to identify for a formative assessment. Provide post-its that can be stuck to the whiteboard under the element name or popsicle sticks with names/numbers to place in buckets with the element name written on it.

ASSESSMENT

A rubric is recommended for the V-Mail letter writing activity for a summative assessment. An example rubric for a 2nd-3rd grade student is provided below. The rubric can be modified for older students to include criteria such as vocabulary words, provided topic or content, etc.

MODIFICATIONS/EXTENSIONS

This lesson can be extended into a semester-long activity where students are assigned to or randomly choose a class pen-pal. Students will write each other weekly V-Mail letters on topics assigned by the teacher. All letters would be assessed by the teacher before delivery to students.

RESOURCES

- V-Mail Process in Photos (pg. 4-9)
- V-Mail Worksheet (pg. 10)
- Rubric Assessment for V-Mail Worksheet (pg. 11)

V-MAIL PROCESSING IN PHOTOS

All photographs come from the National WWII Museum's Digital Collection. These photographs are from the service of Mary Lynes, Women's Army Corps (WAC), who served in Papua New Guinea. Gift of Mr. John M., Sr. Lynes, 2010.309.

Film that holds thousands of V-Mail letters arrives via airplane.



The film is processed upon its arrival. After developing the film, the fixing bath is poured over the film.



The developed film is enlarged from about the size of a thumbnail to 4 ¼ x 5 in.



Letters are printed onto large rolls of paper and inspected for quality. If an image did not develop well, it was marked out and re-processed.



Letters were cut from the large roll of paper into individual letters.

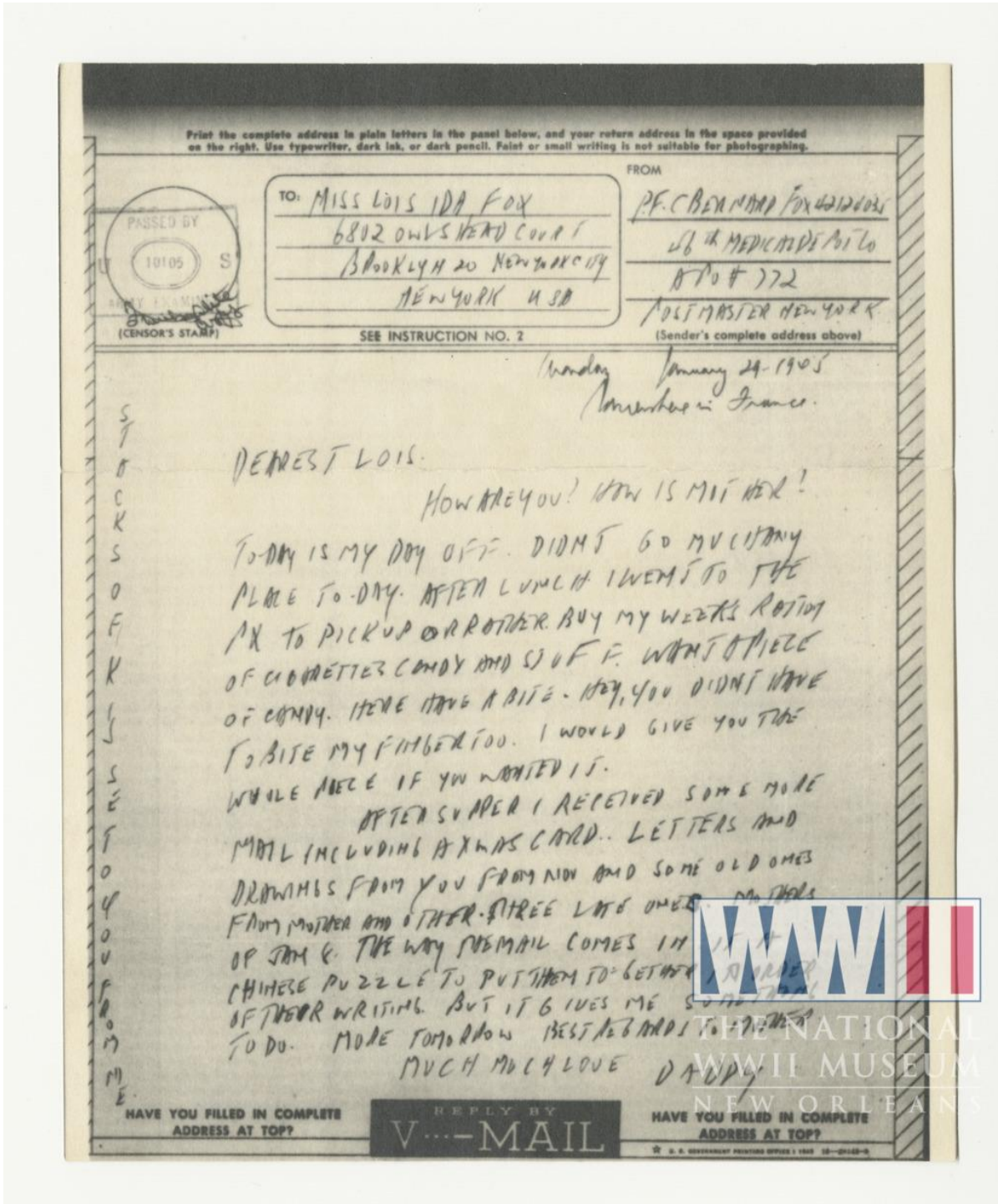


After being placed in envelopes, letters were sorted, bagged, delivered to military personnel.

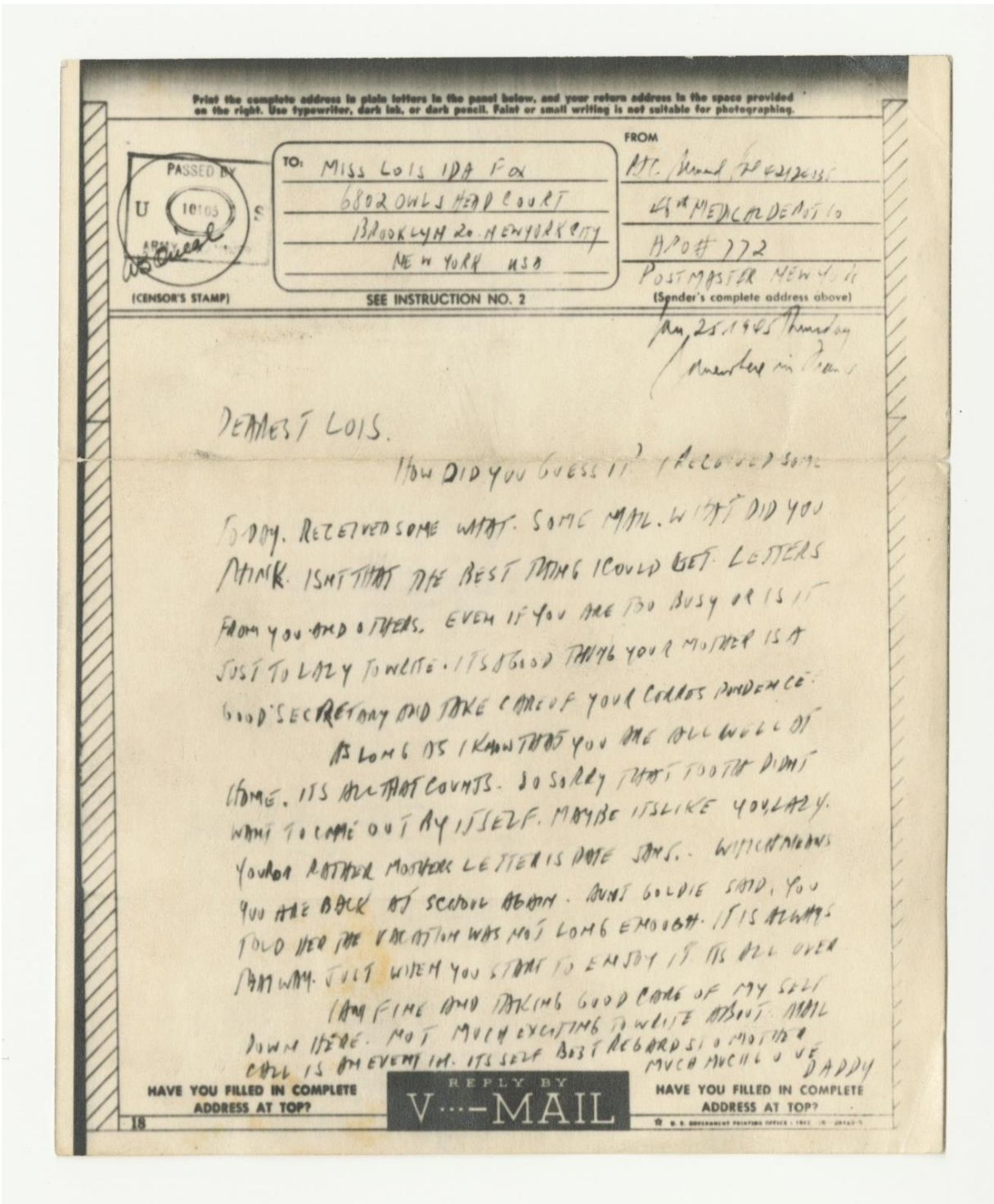


IDENTIFY ELEMENTS OF AN INFORMAL LETTER

All photographs come from the National WWII Museum's Digital Collection. These photographs are from the service of Private First Class Bernard Fox, who served in the 46th Medical Depot Company in the European Theater of Operations. Gift of Ms. Lois I. Solomon, 2015.031.




IDENTIFY ELEMENTS OF AN INFORMAL LETTER



IDENTIFY ELEMENTS OF AN INFORMAL LETTER

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Point or small writing is not suitable for photographing.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

TO: MISS LOIS IDA FOX
 512 OWLS HEAD COURT
 BROOKLYN 20 NEW YORK CITY
 NEW YORK

FROM
 PFC. BERNARD FOX 42124035
 54 MEDICAL DEPT 10
 421 = 772
 POST OFFICE NEW YORK
 (Sender's complete address above)

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

M
A
M
Y
K
I
S
S
E
S
T
O
M
Y
Q
U
I
T
E
A
L
A
D
Y
D
A
Y

Friday Jan 26 1945
 Manhattan in France

DEAREST LOIS,

EVERY THING IS ROSEY HERE TODAY. I JUST RECEIVED MOST OF MY BACK MAIL NOV 22 TO DEC 4TH MISSING DEC 15TH AND AS AN ADDED SURPRISE 2 LETTERS DATED JANUARY 15TH ONE FROM MOTHER AND ONE FROM AUNT CLARA IN BUFFALO.

MY BUTCH. EVEN THE OLD MAIL IS MOST WELCOME AND JUST AS MANY TIMES READ. JUST LEARNED ABOUT YOUR MEN OUT FIT. MOTHER SAYS YOU ARE QUITE THE LADY IN YOUR NEW COAT AND HAT. ALSO I LIKE YOUR NEW UNIFORMS. REMEMBER THE 6 IF I ALSO HAVE WOOLEN UNIFORMS. EXCEPT THAT I NEVER WORE THE PANTS PART. ALSO GO IF YOU A LETTER ABOUT THERING. I AM GLAD THAT YOU LIKE IT. ALSO I BETTER ANN OLSEN WRITE. DO YOU ALWAYS THANK THE CHILDREN WHEN THEY WRITE TO ME. IT IS VERY NICE TO WRITE TO THEM AS I DO IN THE STATES.

THESE LETTERS MAKE ME FEEL SOME DADDY SO VERY HAPPY. AS HAPPY AS I CAN BE SO FAR AWAY. TELL MOTHER I HOPE SHE GOT THE PENCILS SHE ORDERED OK. MORE TOMORROW BEST REGARDS TO MOTHER

KEEP WELL AND LOVE YOU. MUCH MUCH LOVE
 DADDY

ENTER LOIS IDA FOX
 HAVE YOU FILED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

V-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

WRITE YOUR OWN V-MAIL

Directions: Write a letter to a friend or family member. Be sure to include the five elements of an informal letter: a heading, a greeting, a body, a closing, and a signature. Remember: write the name and address of who you are sending your letter to in the center box.

The form is a large rectangle divided into three main sections. The top section is a header area containing three elements: a circle on the left for a stamp, a rounded rectangle in the middle with three horizontal lines for an address, and three horizontal lines on the right for a return address. The middle section is a large, empty rectangular box for writing the letter's body. The bottom section is a small black rectangle with the text "V-MAIL" written in white, bold, capital letters.

RUBRIC: V-MAIL WORKSHEET

	0-1	2	3	4	5
HEADING Name, address (street, city, state, zip code), and date	No heading included in the letter.	1-2 parts of the heading are included (i.e. name and first line of address).	3 parts of the heading are included.	4-5 parts of the heading are included.	All parts of the heading are included.
GREETING, CLOSING, AND SIGNATURE	No greeting, closing, or signature included.	1 element (greeting, closing, or signature) included.	2 elements included (greeting, closing, and/or signature).	3 elements included, however are not cohesive.	3 elements included and cohesive.
BODY	Body includes 2 or fewer sentences with no clear topic.	Body includes at least 3 sentences with no clear topic.	Body includes 3-4 sentences with somewhat clear topic.	Body includes 3-4 sentences with clear topic, however may slightly veer off-topic.	Body includes 3-5 sentences with clear topic from beginning to end.
SPELLING	5 or more spelling errors	4 spelling errors	3 spelling errors	2 spelling errors	1 or no spelling errors
GRAMMAR	5 or more grammatical errors	4 grammatical errors	3 grammatical errors	2 grammatical errors	1 or no grammatical errors