



Creative Wordworking

Fun Ideas
for Writers





Creative Wordworking

A note to adults:

This manual, which is a part of the 4-H Youth Development Building Bridges: Reaching People Through Communication program, has been designed to encourage youth to find creative ways of expressing themselves in writing.

This project is intended to be used by youth of various ages depending on their interests and the resources that are available to them. Middle school and high school aged youth will gain the most from this project if they can rely on adults to respect their need to work independently. The project can also be adapted for use with younger children, and while it will be important to guide their efforts they will also need to be given room for their individuality to come forward.

Communication as a Primary Life Skill

This project focuses on the life skill of communication with a particular emphasis on the importance of developing creative approaches to using words and language as a means of creative expression.

Fun with journals and diaries

People have been putting their personal thoughts into journals and diaries for thousands of years. Since it has worked for so many other people, you might want to give it a try, too.

A journal or diary lets you say exactly what you want to say and nobody but you will get to see what you write.

Writing in a journal or diary is very easy to do. In fact you can do it any way you want to do it because there aren't any rules to follow—unless you make them up yourself. About the only “rule” most people agree on is the importance of finding a private place to keep their journals when they're not in use.

The best way to get started is to find an empty notebook and start writing.

If you want something a little more special, consider purchasing a blank book from any store that sells cards, books, or stationery. In case you think you have nothing to write about, the following pages are full of ideas.

All kinds of ideas for things to write about in your journal or diary.

Make a list.

Are you a busy person? Do you have so much to do that you're afraid you won't have enough time to write in a journal? Making lists could be the answer for you. You can use lists to summarize things that have happened since the last time you wrote. It's a quick and easy way to get your ideas written down in just a couple of minutes.

If you like the idea of making lists, you might even want to make a list of things to list! To get you started, here are a few ideas:

- Things you've lost and hope you'll find someday
- Words you like because of the way they sound
- All the people in your life who have been important to you
- All the ways you have changed in the past 10 years
- Reasons why people should be kind to one another
- Interesting things you would like to know more about
- Your most cherished possessions
- Fictional characters (from books, movies and TV) you would like to meet
- Favorite sounds, sights, smells, tastes and textures
- People who have influenced you
- Things you hope you'll have accomplished by the time you're age 40
- Things that upset or frighten you
- Things that make you truly happy or thankful
- Characteristics, qualities or skills you'd like to develop

10 secrets about writing in a journal or diary

1. You don't have to write every day.
2. You don't have to write once a week.
3. You don't have to write once a month.
4. You can write in your journal or diary whenever you want to.
5. You don't have to write a lot.
6. If you only want to write one sentence that's okay.
7. You don't even have to write sentences if you don't want to.
8. You don't have to worry about how words are spelled (although it's always a good idea to get into the habit of spelling things correctly).
9. You don't have to have beautiful handwriting.
10. You can use whatever words you'd like — even the ones you would never say in front of your grandparents.

Get to know you

People who write in diaries and journals usually end up discovering things about themselves. Here are some ideas:

- Outline the important “stepping stones” that have happened to you over the years. Write your very own “philosophy” of life by describing the things you believe and value.
- Describe yourself the way other people might. (For example, what do you suppose it's like to have you for a son or daughter, sister or brother, or friend?)
- Try predicting what you might be like when you're age 30 and older.

Answer some questions.

Pick out a few of the following questions to copy into your journal (or make up some of your own) and see what kind of answers you can come up with.

- What do you like best about being in 4-H?
- Who are your “heroes” and why do you admire them?
- If you could have dinner with a famous person who would it be and why?
- What do you think it is like to be your mother or father, or other family member?
- What is something most people probably don't know about you unless they've gotten to know you really well?
- If you could choose a different first name, what would it be, and why?
- What is something you would like to change about yourself and why?

Use a photograph.

Snapshots and photos can be great sources of inspiration for your journal or diary. Pick out a picture to describe. If you want you could actually paste it into your journal, otherwise jot down a brief description of who's in the picture and where and when it was taken (if you know). Then let your memory and imagination take over.

- If you were there when the picture was taken, try filling in details about what was happening at the time.
- If you're using an old family photo, it's fun to examine the photo for details and then imagine what might have been happening. (For example: Do the people in the photo seem comfortable with one another? Are they touching or do they appear to be avoiding each other? Do they look happy, bored, irritated or worried?)
- Describe what you think might have been going on right before the photo was snapped, and immediately afterward.
- Don't ignore the photographer! Who had the camera? What might have motivated him or her to take this particular picture?

Be your own good friend.

Writing in a journal or diary can help you handle things that are bothering you. It lets you pour out feelings, frustrations and fears without being criticized for what you say. Once you've gotten it all off your chest, you can help yourself figure out what to do about it. Think about how you would respond to a good friend who needs your help with a problem. Then do the same thing for yourself by writing it all down in your journal. Here are some suggestions:

- Write down the positive things that make you a special and unique person.
- Make a list of people you could talk to about what's bothering you. (It might be helpful to "practice" what you want to tell them by writing it out.)
- Describe some things you can start doing differently.
- Make a list of all the things you can do to cheer yourself up.
- Write a promise to yourself that you will follow your own good advice.

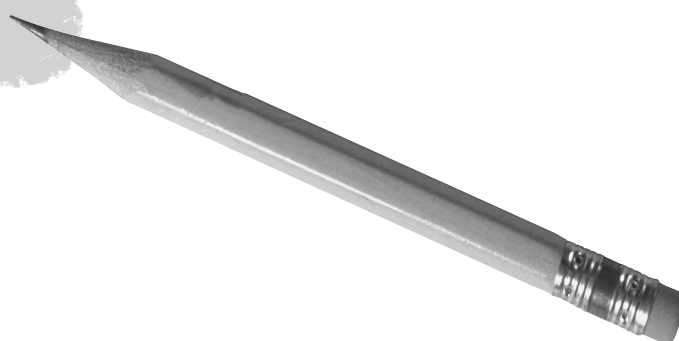
Record your memories.

A journal or diary makes a wonderful place to store important things that have happened so you won't forget them. If you are too busy to write regularly you can pick out one or two important things that have happened to you since the last time you wrote. Or dig a little deeper to see what you can find from an earlier time in your life. For example:

- Describe one of the earliest memories you have.
- If you have younger brothers or sisters, write about what it was like to have a new baby in the family.
- Describe the toys you used to play with when you were a child.
- Try to remember the first time you realized how cruel people can be to other people and write about the experience.
- Write about what it was like to finally know how to do something you had been trying to learn for a long time (how to read, or ride a bike, for example).

You might also want to describe stories older family members have told you about their own lives. Someday you'll thank yourself for having preserved those memories when you had the chance.

Writing in a journal is a good way to "talk" to yourself.



Imaginary letters

If you're still looking for things to put in your journal, here's a great way to let your imagination take over. Here are some suggestions to get you going:

Write to your future self.

Time travel is possible when your imagination takes you into the future to communicate with the person you think you'll be. Be sure to put the date on your letter, and then make some predictions about what life will be like for you 10 or 20 years from now. Or stop and think about the person you want to be so that you can ask yourself how you're doing.

Write to an intelligent life form on another planet.

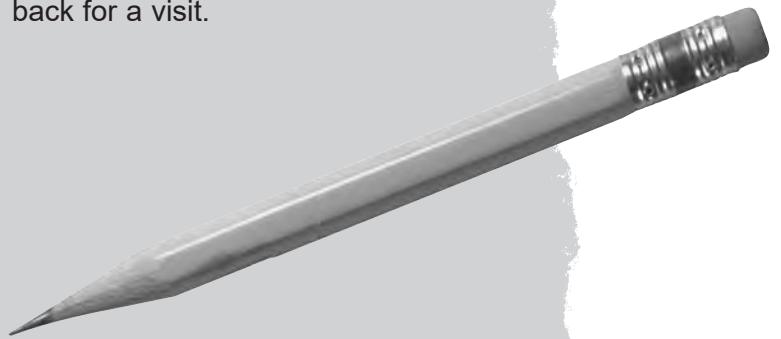
If you've ever wondered about extra-terrestrial life forms, here's a chance to make imaginary contact with them. Try describing what it's like to use words and speech instead of mental telepathy to communicate with other life forms.

Write to a fictional character in a book you've read or from a movie or TV show.

You've probably read about people that you wish you could get to know in real life. Here's the next best thing to doing that. Explain why you like (or dislike) that person and describe any similarities or differences between his or her fictional world and your own life.

Write to an ancestor from a previous generation.

You would not be the person you are today if it weren't for all the people who lived long before you got here. Why not write a note about some of the things you think you've inherited from them. Or describe the things they'd find most amazing about life now if they were to come back for a visit.



What's fun about these letters is that you can say pretty much whatever you want to say since you won't be mailing them.

Write to your future spouse (if you hope to get married someday).

You probably haven't met the person you'll be spending the rest of your life with, but you can introduce yourself right now by writing to him or her. List the qualities you're hoping he or she will bring to your marriage as well as what you yourself will be contributing. End by describing some of the things you hope the two of you will be able to do together when you finally meet.

You could also write a similar letter to a future child, if you're hoping to be a parent someday. Tell him or her some of the things you hope you'll remember to do when it's time for you to be the mom or dad.

It will be fun for you to find these letters in future years. So be sure to save them.

Write a letter that could be put in a bottle and dropped into the ocean.

What would you say to someone you've never met—someone who probably will never get to meet you either? Do you have any special thoughts you've never shared with anyone before? Are there some secret hopes and dreams you've never revealed to another living soul? Here's your chance to get it all in writing.

Write to someone who hurt you.

It helps to put your feelings into words—especially when you're feeling badly about something that someone has said or done to you. Write to the so-called friend who snubbed you; the teacher who embarrassed you in front of the class; the parent who didn't listen to your side of the story; or the brother or sister who made you take the blame for something you didn't do. Writing an imaginary letter will let you describe how upset you are about what happened.

Write to someone you love.

Think about the important people who really matter to you and why you feel the way you do about them. Then put those feelings into words. When you're finished, consider copying the letter onto a separate piece of paper and actually giving it to the person you were thinking about.

P.S.

If you like the idea of imaginary letters, why not consider writing a few real ones? It's a great way to communicate with people you don't see very often. And if you've got access to e-mail, it's even easier. For some fun ideas about how to have fun through the mail, check out pages 15 and 16 in this manual.

And finally...here are a few extra ideas from people who have already discovered the fun of writing in their journals or diaries:

I like to add other stuff to my journal when I feel like it. It's full of drawings, doodles, photos, cartoons, notes from friends and even stuff I've clipped from magazines.

Every once in a while I feel so good about what I've written that I just have to show it to someone. But only if I really trust that person and even then I won't let them read anything except what I want to show them.

I have a journal just for writing about special places I've been. I only write in it when I'm on a trip or go somewhere special. It helps me make sure I don't forget the fun I had.

Tell people who are just starting out to always remember to put the date down each time they write. It's fun to read back later and see what you wrote about that day.

I LIKE TO USE DIFFERENT COLORED PENS WHEN I WRITE IN MY JOURNAL DEPENDING ON WHAT KIND OF MOOD I'M IN. I USE RED INK WHEN I'M REALLY ANGRY AND BLUE INK WHEN I'M FEELING CALM. BLACK INK IS FOR "HEAVY THOUGHTS" AND PURPLE IS FOR DESCRIBING ALL MY WILD AND CRAZY IDEAS.

Writing poetry for the fun of it.

If you think poetry is stuffy and boring, it could be that you've never had a chance to have some fun with it. This could turn out to be that chance. So why not give it a try?

Poetry is a lot like painting. The difference is that instead of paints and colors poetry uses the rhythms and sounds of language to create images of things. And remember — poetry doesn't have to rhyme unless you want it to.

Vertical Poems

Here's a great way to take one word and turn it into a complete poem. The first thing you need to do is decide on the word you want to use. It could be a feeling or a special quality you think is important to have, such as love, kindness, or courage. Or it could be a place or a thing. It could even be your own name.

Write your word vertically down the center of a piece of paper. The use each letter to become part of a line in the poem that describes the word. Here's an example.

each
Of them has
leaRned to
Shake their shining manes
Every time
Someone offers them sugar cubes

Telephone number poem

This is a lot like a vertical poem except instead of using a word, you start by writing your telephone number vertically down the left side of the paper. The poem can be about anything at all and you get to use the numbers to determine how many words to have in each line of the poem. (Zeros are bonuses—you get to use as many words as you want.) Here's an example.

5 Here is a short list
3 of golden things:
5 daffodils glistening in the rain;
4 haystacks in the summer;
6 a bright grove of autumn trees;
1 and
7 hundreds of stars on a wintry
night

Cinquain (sin-CANE)

This is a good way to organize your thoughts and put them into a short poem about someone or something in your daily life.

- The first line introduces the subject of the poem using two syllables.
- Line two consists of four syllables that describe or expand the first line.
- Line three has six syllables.
- Line four has eight syllables.
- Line five wraps everything up with two final syllables.

Example:

Gardens
so full of seeds
so full of weeds that grow
and me sweating in the noon sun
worn out.

Example:

Rain came
The sound of drums
Wet music through the night
And while I slept I was really
Dancing.

Nature poems

Many beautiful poems have been written about the outdoor world, the creatures who live there, the things that grow there and the kinds of sights, sounds and smells that can be discovered just by paying attention.

Begin with a place you feel is especially beautiful. Spend some time there by yourself. Notice what's around you and how it affects your senses or inspires your thoughts.

When you're ready, think of a special phrase that describes how you feel about what you've observed (for example, "*the world is a gentle place*"). Use this phrase somewhere in your poem as a way of organizing your thoughts. You can also repeat the phrase as a way of linking together stanzas or verses.

Example: The world is a gentle place
Of purple mists in the morning
And delicate drops of rain that fall all day long
On quiet roof tops.

I have seen the moon drift behind the trees
And heard the wind at night
This is how I know
The world is a gentle place.

"Found poems"

All you need is a scissors and a stack of old magazines and newspapers. Or, use anything else that has words printed on it. You might be surprised by what you end up with once you start looking. Here's how to "find" a poem and give it a home.

1. Begin by searching for descriptive words and phrases that capture your attention. Cut out as many as you'd like and set them aside.
2. When you think you've finished your search, take a few minutes to look through the words and phrases you've found. Think about what they mean and the kinds of images they bring to mind.
3. Now let your imagination take over. Experiment with how the words and phrases you've selected can be strung together. Decide what you want your finished poem to say so you can glue the words onto a piece of paper.

Hint: Feel free to write in extra words if you think they would fit.



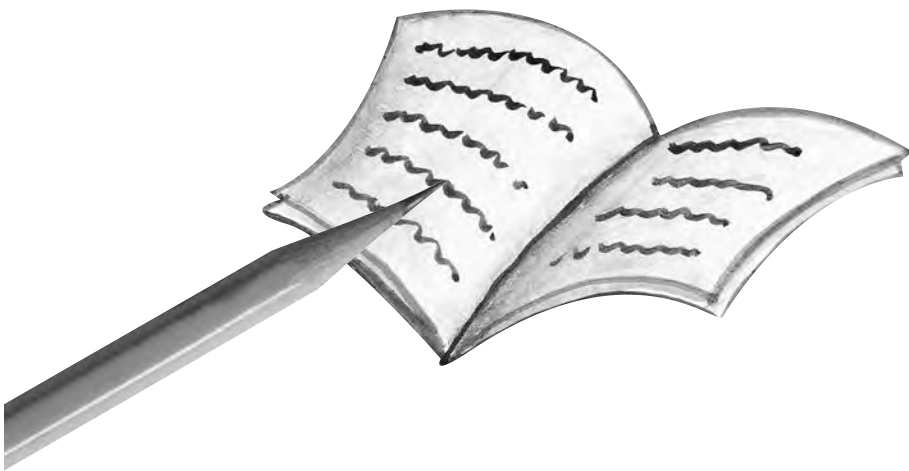
What's a “commonplace book” ?

A commonplace book is a personal collection of things that have been read somewhere else and copied down into one place so they won't be forgotten: quotations, poems, jokes, passages from favorite books or plays, scriptural verses, etc.

There are no rules about how to keep a Commonplace Book except the rules you make up for yourself. All you need to do is keep a book handy for those times you want to copy something into it. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- You might want to purchase a really nice blank book from a card shop or department store. But it's not necessary because spiral notebooks work just as well. If you're really feeling creative, why not make your own book?
- Keep a supply of colored pens and markers handy so you can use a different color each time you have something to copy.
- Let your friends and relatives know about your Commonplace Book in case they find things to pass along to you. Teachers might also have some good suggestions. Just remember — it's your book and you don't have to include something someone else has suggested unless you want to!
- Consider marking down the date each time you add something to your Commonplace Book. And be sure to include the source of the item you are copying.

People have been keeping Commonplace Books since ancient times. Some libraries have examples from as far back as the Middle Ages. Even though it's fun to read another person's Commonplace Book, it's even better to make your own.



Questions and answers about keeping a Commonplace Book

Q What else can I put in my Commonplace Book besides things I read in books?

A Written words are everywhere and once you start paying attention you'll probably find lots of neat things. How about copying the lyrics from a favorite song? Or maybe there's an interesting magazine or newspaper headline that has captured your attention. Slogans on billboards, magazine ads and even bumper stickers can be extremely clever. You might even find something worth copying the next time you have breakfast and find yourself reading the cereal box.

Q Does it matter how things are organized?

A People usually copy whatever they think is interesting into their Commonplace Book regardless of whether or not it "fits" with what's already there. You don't have to divide things into sections or group them together by subject or category—unless you'd rather do it that way.

Q Can I add pictures or photos or should I stick to words alone?

A It's your book so you can do anything you'd like. Sometimes people illustrate the things they've copied by adding hand-drawn sketches or cartoons. You might want to attach things other people have drawn for you, or illustrations you've clipped out of a newspaper or magazine.

Q Can I include things I've written myself in my Commonplace Book?

A That's entirely up to you. Some people prefer writing really personal things in a journal or diary and keeping them private. But there's certainly no reason why you can't make notes in your Commonplace Book to explain why you like a certain quote or passage that you've copied.

Q What if I make a mistake when I'm copying something?

A No big deal! Most people make mistakes now and then while copying things from one place into another. So if that happens to you all you need to do is fix it and keep going.

Using (or not using) E-mail

If you use e-mail you know how much fun it is to “talk” to people via the computer. If you don’t have e-mail access, keep in mind you don’t need to rely on the Internet to send your thoughts and ideas to somebody else through the mail. People have been sending messages back and forth for hundreds of years—before anyone had ever heard of e-mail!

Writing to another person is a great way to communicate thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, however, people end up saying the same old things again and again and it can get pretty boring. Here are some ways you can have fun through the mail or via e-mail communicating with other people.

Betcha didn’t know . . .

Add pizzazz to your e-mail messages or regular mail letters by telling people things they might not already know about you. For example, try to describe:

- The best (or worst, or funniest, or most embarrassing) thing that happened to you since the last time you wrote
- Something you hope happens between now and the next time you plan to write
- Something you have been worrying about lately
- Something you succeeded at doing recently
- Something that caught you by surprise
- Someone who made you extremely angry (or extremely happy) recently
- Something about you that most people would be surprised to discover
- Something you would love to be able to do if only you had the chance
- Someone or something you have been dreaming about lately.

At the end of your letter or message, ask the other person to write back to tell you something about him/herself that you probably don’t know.

Two truths and one little white lie.

Honesty is always the best policy, but sometimes it can be fun to let your imagination take over for just a little while, as long as the other person knows that’s what you’re doing! Next time you write to someone, explain that you’ll be describing three things that have happened to you recently or that you are looking forward to happening soon. Two of those things should be the honest truth. But the other one should be something you’ve just made up. Then have your friend write back and guess which is which.

Basic e-mail etiquette

E-mail isn't as private as it seems. Other people can easily find ways to get access to your correspondence. So if you have something very personal to confide to another person, better not do it via e-mail.

Some people think e-mail gives them an excuse to say whatever they want—using any kind of language—even though it's rude, obscene or unkind. There's never a good reason for talking that way to another person, so why do it over the Internet? The words you use to express yourself reveal a lot about the kind of person you are. When you use rude and obnoxious language, you're insulting yourself just as much as the person to whom you're writing.

Tell me.

Begin by sending the other person a few questions. Ask him or her to write back with the answers and two new questions for you.

Here are some questions to get the game started:

- What New Year's resolutions did you make last January—and have you kept them?
- What is something you're looking forward to (or dreading) that's going to happen next week?
- If I were going to describe you to someone who has never met you, what are three words I could use?
- When was the last time you got really mad at someone and what did they do to make you feel that way? What did you do? How did you respond?
- What's something you're hoping will happen to you in the next six months?

Speaking of e-mail

1 E-mail can bring people together.

E-mail makes it quick and easy for people to keep the lines of communication open. It's a great way for family members who don't live in the same house to stay in touch. Just remember that e-mail is simply a tool. It can never take the place of really talking to another person face-to-face.

2 Stick to the facts!

If you're writing to someone you have never met, you might be tempted to stretch the truth about yourself in order to impress the other person. Some people make up all kinds of things about themselves because they figure the other person will never find out anyway. Creating a fantasy world and hiding behind a false image of yourself might seem like fun at the time. In the long run, however, it can cheat you out of an honest relationship with another person.

3 Don't be fooled.

You can't automatically assume that everything you hear via e-mail is the truth. The person on the other end might not be the person he or she is pretending to be!

The pleasure of old fashioned letters

In the past—before telephones or computers—the only way to keep in touch with people who lived far away was to write letters. Sometimes it took months and months for those letters to get delivered. No wonder they were so precious when they finally arrived.

These days, answering machines and e-mail help our messages get through quickly and efficiently. Even so, there's still something special about finding a letter from a friend or relative waiting in the mailbox. Are you someone who would love to get a “real” letter now and then? The best way to get letters is to send letters, and that can be as much fun as getting them. Here's how:

Put together a mail kit.

You can find cool stationery and note cards in just about any color, size and pattern. Check out the office or school supply section of any department store for pens. Start a collection and keep it all together in one place. Then add to it whenever something catches your eye.

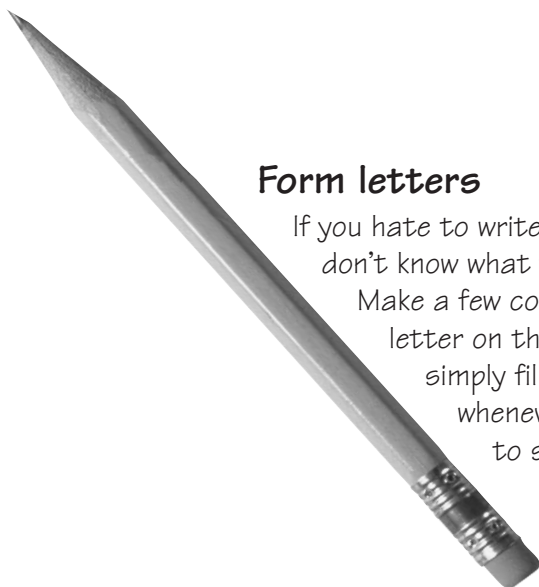
Be creative.

Use stickers, stamp pads, marking pens, glitter or anything else you can think of to decorate your own notepaper and envelopes.

Don't worry if you can't write a long letter.

Use a post card instead to jot down a short note letting somebody know what you've been up to lately. Why not start collecting interesting postcards to have handy, or make your own by decorating one side of a standard size index card and using the other for your message.

Enclose a photo, drawing, newspaper clipping, or anything else that is flat and can be easily slipped into an envelope.



Form letters

If you hate to write letters because you don't know what to say, here's an idea:
Make a few copies of the form letter on the next page and simply fill in the blanks whenever you want to write to someone.

Dear _____.

I hope you don't mind getting a form letter, but I wanted to write and tell you that I would have written sooner, but I've just been so _____ lately that I haven't been able to. It's probably because of all the _____ I've had to do.

The weather has been:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> rainy | <input type="checkbox"/> sunny | <input type="checkbox"/> gorgeous | <input type="checkbox"/> windy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> snowy | <input type="checkbox"/> gloomy | <input type="checkbox"/> warm | <input type="checkbox"/> cold |
| <input type="checkbox"/> foggy | <input type="checkbox"/> bright | <input type="checkbox"/> misty | <input type="checkbox"/> stormy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> icy | <input type="checkbox"/> humid | <input type="checkbox"/> yucky | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

So that means I have have not been able to _____ and that has been _____

Things have been pretty _____ around here. I've been feeling:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> excited | <input type="checkbox"/> bored | <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> sad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> upset | <input type="checkbox"/> happy | <input type="checkbox"/> furious | <input type="checkbox"/> wonderful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> glad | <input type="checkbox"/> miserable | <input type="checkbox"/> great | <input type="checkbox"/> stressed out |
| <input type="checkbox"/> worried | <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> pleased | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

The reason I feel that way is probably because _____

I thought you might also be interested to know that I _____

so that will probably _____

I sure hope you _____

so be sure to remember _____

- Love,
- Sincerely Yours,
- Yours Truly

A few kind words

Words have a lot of power. Just as cruel words spoken in anger and spite can hurt badly, the opposite is also true. Words spoken in kindness and friendship can make a person feel wonderful.

Here's a way to turn kind words into a cool little gift you can give to someone special in your life. (After all, a few kind words really can be the nicest gifts of all!)


You'll need:

- a long straight strip of paper that can be folded accordion style
- heavier paper to use as a cover
- glue
- yarn or ribbon
- empty matchbox (optional)
- marking pens, glitter, stickers, etc.

Begin by following the instructions on the next page for making, illustrating and decorating an accordion style book. You can be as creative as you want to be!

When it's completely dry, you'll be ready to fill the book with "kind words" to let someone know you're thinking of him or her. Here are just a few ideas:

- Fill it with words of encouragement for a friend who's worried about something.
- Use it to say thank you.
- Make it into a tiny birthday book full of words that describe the birthday person.
- Use it as a Valentine and fill it up with reasons why you love that person.
- Fill it with words to cheer up someone who's ill.
- Turn it into a very special Mother's or Father's Day gift.
- Fill it with short quotes, proverbs, scripture verses or other sayings and give the book to someone who is celebrating a very special occasion (confirmation, graduation, wedding or anniversary).

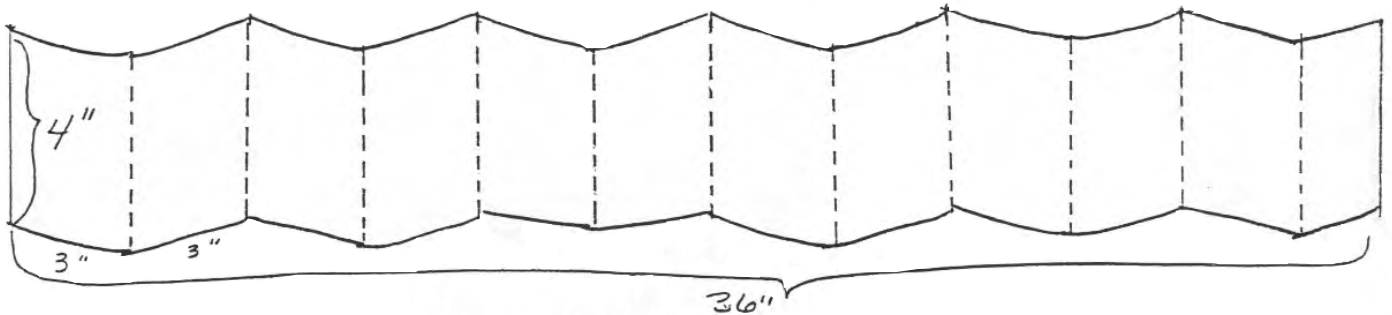


It's important
to pay
attention to
the words we
use and the
effect they
can have on
the people
around us

Accordion Book Instructions

- 1 Cut a long straight strip of paper that is as high as you want each page, and as long as the width of a page times (x) the number of pages:

For Example: If you want pages 4" high by 3" wide and you want 12 pages, the length of the strip will be 36"



- 2 Fold like an accordion.

- 3 Cut two covers out of stiff paper.

Open Accordion

(opens like an accordion)



1. Glue one cover to the last page of the accordion.
2. Lay a piece of ribbon or cord across the inside of the other cover.
3. Glue both to the front page of the accordion.

Closed Accordion

(opens like a book or fan)



1. Place the 2 covers side by side, face down.
2. Lay the piece of cord or ribbon across both covers.
3. Glue the first and last page of the accordion to the two covers.



Other books
in this series
include:

4-H Public Speaker's Handbook:

A Youth's Guide to Preparing and Presenting Speeches and Demonstrations

A Parent's Guide to Public Speaking

Communication Activities for 4-H Clubs and Other Youth Groups

Crazy about Books:

Having Fun with a Reading Circle

It's All in the Family:

Source Book of Communication Activities, Projects and Other Things to Do Together

Teaching Resources for Youth Educators:

Source Book of Activities, Projects, Handouts and Other Ideas for Teaching Communication Skills

Voices from the Past:

Listening to People with Stories to Tell



people who are just
starting out to always
remember to put the date
down each time they
write. It's fun to read
later and see what
I wrote about that



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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Carl O'Connor, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Madison, Wisconsin, 53706.



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