

Guidelines and FAQ

Thank you for your interest in writing letters to our nation's heroes!

Ensure that all who serve know that his or her sacrifices are APPRECIATED...



WRITE A LETTER!



Operation Gratitude sends 200,000+ Care Packages each year to Deployed Troops, Veterans, New Recruits & First Responders. Of all the items included in these packages, the most cherished are the personal letters of appreciation!

Our goal is to include several letters and colorful drawings in every Care Package and tell our heroes **"WE CARE!"**

Writing a letter is a meaningful way for Americans to show support for all who serve. It only takes five minutes of your day, but will bring lasting joy to the recipients.



Don't know where to start?

- Start with a salutation, such as "Dear Hero" or "Dear Brave One"
- You can write to a: Deployed Troop, Veteran, New Recruit, First Responder
- **Note:** A Deployed Troop is currently overseas in harm's way. A Veteran has served our country in the past. A New Recruit just completed Boot Camp and has sworn to serve for the next 4+ years. A First Responder serves as a firefighter, a paramedic, or in law enforcement. All deserve to be thanked for their commitment & bravery
- Express your thanks for their selfless service
- Avoid politics completely and religion in excess; however, saying you pray for them, is wonderful
- Share a little about yourself: Family, Hobbies, Work, School, Pets, Travel
- Talk about life & interests: Sports, Weather, Music, Movies, Food, Books
- Adults: Include your contact information (mail or email) so the letter/package recipient can reply. Children: **FIRST NAMES ONLY** and no addresses please
- Can't find the words? Consider drawing or painting a picture instead; please add a note to kids' drawings with their age (Please avoid glitter!)

We like to include at least 5 letters per care package, so we need hundreds of thousands of them for our Deployed Troops, New Recruits, and Veterans. We can only do that with your support and participation!



We are told again and again that the most cherished items in the packages are the personal letters of appreciation.

We want all of our nation's heroes to know how much we care about them, and nothing says that more than your words on a piece of paper that can be saved forever.

We receive countless emails every month asking for information about our letter writing program. **Here are answers to some FAQ's:**

Question: How should I start my letter?

Answer: We suggest that you start with "Dear Hero", "Dear Patriot", "Dear Brave One", "Dear Service Member", "Dear Warrior", "Dear Veteran", or create a greeting of your own. We ask that you **please do not use "Dear Soldier" or "Dear Marine" or "Dear Sailor"** as those terms refer to membership in specific military branches, and we cannot guarantee those letters will be placed in packages going to that service.

Question: What should my letter say, and how long should it be?

Answer: Two paragraphs or more would be nice. One or more paragraphs that express thanks for their service, dedication, sacrifice, hard work, and/or time away from home. And one or more paragraphs about yourself, your work, interesting stories, sports, music, movies, etc. Please be sure to read the instructions below regarding limitations on personal information, and avoid politics or controversial topics in your letter.

Question: Should I put every letter or card I write in a separate envelope?

Answer: No. We ask that you do NOT use individual envelopes for any cards or letters. Why? Because every letter or card that comes to us must be screened prior to being placed in our care packages. It takes an undue amount of volunteer time to remove the letters from the envelopes, and then we do not include the envelopes in the packages anyway. This means that your envelopes might end up being discarded. (We hate to be wasteful!) If you have excess envelopes that you would like to donate, please send those to us separately.

Question: Can I write letters specifically intended for Veterans?

Answer: Yes. Please open your letter with "Dear Veteran" and refer to their past service.

Question: Can I write letters specifically intended for New Recruits?

Answer: Yes. Please indicate this by starting your letter with a greeting like "Dear New Recruit," and thank them for joining the military and for their commitment to our country. Please remember that they are just beginning their military career, and have not yet been deployed overseas.

Question: Should I fold my letters?

Answer: If possible, please send them to us unfolded to save time for our letter screeners. After

screening, we have a very specific way to fold letters for best fit and placement into the care packages.

Question: What size paper should I use to write my letter?

Answer: We accept letters on any size paper or note card up to (but no larger than) 8 ½" x 11." Please do not send oversized banners.

Question: Does my letter need to be handwritten?

Answer: No. Typed letters are fine, but we do prefer that you hand sign each letter.

Question: Can I make copies of a letter?

Answer: Yes! You can send multiple copies of the same letter. You can either hand write the same letter over and over, or use your printer to make copies. However, please hand sign each copy in non-black ink to make your letters feel more personal.

Question: Can or should I write about my family members who served in the military?

Answer: Yes, as long as it is a positive story, and not about sad events. We ask that your letter be uplifting and serve to put a smile on the recipient's face!

Question: Can I use colorful construction paper for my children to write letters?

Answer: Yes. As long as you stay within the paper size limit of 8 ½" x 11".

Question: Can I use glitter or foam stickers on my letters or cards?

Answer: NO! This is very important: Glitter will contaminate the entire care package! Foam stickers are too bulky for our care packages and prevent us from including other needed items. Plain stickers are great and we encourage their use.

Question: Will the troops write back?

Answer: Possibly. But, you will need to send them some basic information on how and where you would like to receive a reply:

If the letter writer is an adult:

- Feel free to send your email or mailing address (though keep in mind your own privacy concerns).

If the letter writer is under 18 years old:

- Use the minor's first name and provide an adult's email address only.
- Include students' FIRST NAMES ONLY – Please include the School Name/Teacher, Contact Info (School mailing address or School/Teacher email) on every letter so recipients can write back
- Screen all responses from the military members prior to letting minors read the replies.
- Continue to monitor any on-going correspondence between the minor and the service member(s).