Modern guide to love letters

Write sober

You know not to drink and text, so don't write a drunken letter either.

Don't be needy

Never plead, and remember your sense of humour.

Be empathetic

When writing, think how you would feel if you received your own letter.

Don't be silly

Never refer to past lovers.

Keep it romantic

Don't make it too lascivious or sexual – this isn't a one-night stand.

Be intimate

Katharine Mansfield said: 'This is not a letter, but my arms around you for a moment.

Add the personal touches

If you're sending a card rather than a letter, find an illustration or photograph that will mean something. Leave the hearts and flowers to the next person.

Be artistic

Draw your own emoji.

Or draw your own cartoon

Charles Schultz wrote special messages to his paramour in his Peanuts strips.

No green ink

Don't be fishy

Probably best to ignore the advice of a Chinese writing guide from 1938 which suggested that love letters should be accompanied by a basket of fish.

Give yourself a little time

This is not a tweet.

Be sincere

No pressure, but write as if your words will be clutched to your recipient's heart for ever and a day.

Be mysterious

If you're writing anonymously for Valentine's Day, think about whether you really want to leave your crush totally baffled. Leave a vague clue, perhaps…

Be prepared

A proper pen and high-quality paper will not turn you into Byron or Keats, but it might improve your prose by 10 per cent.

Be on trend

In Victorian times, an upside-down stamp on the upper left of an envelope meant 'I love you' to some, but 'I don't love you' to others. Confusion reigned. Break-ups followed.

Buy a stamp and address your envelope first

That way you won't be panicking just before the post goes.

Be bold
You won't be the first

'I am dying so for the love of you... you have made me dazed and thunderstruck!' That was Marcus Aurelius, writing in about 140 AD.

Not all love letters need to be romantic

A few appreciative words to a member of your family could make them ridiculously happy.

Show passion

Borrow some words from the similarly smitten. Beethoven, perhaps, writing to his Immortal Beloved: 'Never another one can own my heart, never - never!'

Don't use scented notepaper

So 70s, and not all postal staff will share your taste in citrus top notes. Unless, of course, your scent will instantly send the recipient into your arms…

Write from the heart

A letter gives you a chance to say things you're too tongue-tied to say in person.

Mind your handwriting

You don't want the object of your affections to be distracted by it.

Be yourself

Jane Austen once said that the best kind of letter is a 'talking' one: Write as if you were chatting intimately to your friend over tea.

Get soppy

Remember envelopes that were SWALK (sealed with a loving kiss)? Bring that acronym back!

Royal Mail