



My Secret NOTES Formula **for writing heartspoken personal notes** **that encourage, comfort, and inspire...**

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"I truly appreciated the encouraging letter you sent me during one of the most difficult and testing times of my life. I know I have read your note over 25 times; it was a lifeline which kept my spirits up."

"As I read back over the many cards and notes I received when my mother died, I want to thank you for the lovely words you wrote about my Mom."

"You have no idea how much your note meant to me and how comforting it was to know how much [Name] meant to you and others."

Nothing touches the heart and soul quite like a personal handwritten note that can be held, opened, read, and re-read. The intimacy of holding the page touched by the sender, whose words were penned as an outpouring of love, gratitude, sympathy, or shared emotion, can only be matched by physically being with that person and holding their hand.

Most of us can point to a note or letter we've received at just the right time that seemed like a hug or a healthy dose of love and support. Sometimes it's a message to comfort us after a loss or tragedy. Sometimes it's a pat on the back for a job we didn't think anyone had noticed. Often it's just a reminder that someone has thought of us and cares enough to take pen to paper. If they've included a newspaper clipping or article, we know that they thoughtfully considered our interests.

Why does it seem so hard to write personal notes?

Even knowing how meaningful personal notes can be to someone we love, why, do we find writing them so difficult? Here are a few reasons, and some tips to help you overcome them. I've saved the most challenging one for last:

1. **We're busy and rushed.** True, but part of our job as stewards of our own time is to prioritize our actions and make time to do the important things. I find that setting aside 10-15 minutes first thing in the morning (when I'm fresh) at least once a week ensures that I'll get the most important notes written.
2. **We think writing notes takes a long time.** Most notes can be simple and short. Use my secret NOTES formula below to help you write a beautiful note quickly and easily every time.
3. **We don't think of it.** When it occurs to me that I should write someone – or if they just cross my mind as someone who might need encouragement or congratulations – I add it to my To Do list so I don't forget.

4. **We think of it, but not at a convenient time to write.** Treat it the same way you would any important task that you don't want to forget. Use your SmartPhone, iPad, or other information management tools. I've been known to leave myself a voicemail reminder message!
5. **We think of it, but we don't have pen and appropriate stationery close at hand.** Keep some attractive note cards (check out the great selection at [Heartspoken.com](http://www.heartspoken.com) [http://www.heartspoken.com/shop/]), pen, and stamps in your purse, briefcase, or pocket. Those waiting times at the doctor's office or before a meeting can be quickly turned into a note-writing opportunity. Create a writing space at home where your supplies – and a desk or lapboard – are ready when you are.
6. **We lack confidence that we'll say the right thing.** Do you find yourself struggling over what to say? You simply cannot get hung up on this! While I like to think that my way with words is the secret ingredient to my effective note writing, the truth is that what most people remember is not the exact words, but just the fact they received a note from you and that it came from your heart.

My Secret NOTES Formula

Let **NOTES** be your easy-to-remember acronym for finding the right words for your heartspoken note time and time again, regardless of the situation.

N for Natural: Write as though you are speaking to the recipient. Flowery words are neither necessary nor effective. Think about what you would say to the person if they were sitting across the table from you.

O for Open: Before you start writing, take just a few seconds to open your heart and mind to inner guidance. This will allow you to be receptive to what you should say and how to say it.

T for Tell: Tell them what you want to say. Don't beat around the bush. If it's a sympathy note, it's perfectly okay to start by saying that words are totally inadequate but that you just wanted to reach out to them after the death of their loved one. If it's a thank you note, tell them how much you appreciate their gift or what they did for you. If it's a congratulations note, tell them how pleased and proud you were to learn of their accomplishment. You can often use this TELL sentence as the first line of your note.

E for Empathize: Put yourself in their situation as best you can, and in your mind's eye, visualize them reading your note and think what your desired outcome is. Do you want to comfort or encourage them? Do you want them to know how much their deceased loved one meant to you? Do you want them to know how grateful you are or how proud you are? Do you simply want them to know they are remembered and appreciated? When you identify what you want the outcome to be, the words will come more easily. Sometimes the very best connection you can make with someone is simply to let him know you're sorry, proud, or appreciative.

S for Share, as in share a memory or example. Be as specific as you can. If you're writing a sympathy note, share a memory of the deceased or something you admired about them. Humorous memories can be very comforting.

I remember going fishing with Uncle Jim when I was a teenager, and he always made me feel so grown up. He loved the time I snagged an old shoe and thought I had the biggest fish in the lake.

If you didn't know the deceased, sharing a time when you experienced the same loss can let the recipient know you understand what she is going through. (Note: some experts disagree with this and feel you should never compare a person's pain to an experience you have had. I believe, however, that the need to be understood trumps that risk if it's done authentically.)

When my mother died, I felt bereft for quite some time, so I hope you'll pamper yourself in the days ahead and not let those feelings overwhelm you.

If you *can't* imagine what they're going through, just say that, and don't try to pretend that you can:

Your loss is unimaginable, and I can only let you know how much I share your grief and want to help in some way.

If you're writing a thank you note, be very specific about what you received and how you are using it or enjoying it.

We love the beautiful blue bowl you gave me and Jim for our wedding, and it's filled with fruit right now on our sideboard. I think of you whenever I look at it.

OR

The beautiful blue bowl will be perfect when Jim and I entertain, and it means so much to know that it belonged to your mother.

Isn't that much better than this generic message: "Thank you so much for the lovely gift. Jim and I will enjoy it."

Avoid these common note-writing mistakes

- Don't use religious or other platitudes. It is not comforting in a period of grief, for instance, to be told that God has a plan, even if you believe He does.
- Avoid using phrases that would seem like false comfort to someone who is grieving. For instance, a mother whose baby died in childbirth or as an infant does not want to hear that she has plenty of time to have other children.

- Avoid saying anything that might minimize the loss, such as “You must be relieved that she is not suffering any longer.” Another common blunder is to say, “It’s a blessing in disguise that he doesn’t have to suffer any more.” This is well-intentioned, but not helpful at such a time.
- Along the same vein, don’t try to cheer people up, because it sounds false. Avoid things such as, “Look on the bright side...” or “God doesn’t close doors without opening windows.”
- Proofread your note for spelling errors, overuse of the same word, or sentence awkwardness. If you’re using a computer, don’t rely on the spell-check. I once caught a client’s potentially embarrassing typo when she wrote the words “pubic presentation” instead of “public presentation.” They were both correct in her spell-checker!

Personal note = powerful connection tool

People always ask me if they can convey their messages by email or by phone instead of my handwritten note. Of *course* you can, and doing either of those is so much better than not doing it at all. I believe, however, that writing a note that can be read and re-read is much more personal, and it conveys encouragement, inspiration and comfort so much more powerfully than any other way.

You can become a heartspoken note writer starting right now. Equip yourself with the right tools and the right mindset. Embrace the Nike mantra, and then, “Just do it!”

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Elizabeth is a contributing author of three books in the Amazon-best-selling series, The Gratitude Book Project: [Celebrating 365 Days of Gratitude \(2010 version\)](#), [Celebrating Moms and Motherhood](#), and [A Celebration of Personal Heroes](#).