

Guidelines for Writing to Incarcerated Individuals

You can write electronically or by hard copy. You need to know the incarcerated individual's ID number in both cases.

Link from IDOC about writing people in custody in Iowa:

<https://doc.iowa.gov/friends-and-family-resources/how-do-i-write-offender>

General Guidelines

- You are not allowed to share news about other people—either other insiders or outsiders--and are not allowed to convey messages from others to your pen pal, and vice versa.
- Kindly but firmly shut down any and all “romantic” overtures.
- Do not send anything written in code, although foreign languages are acceptable.
- Assume each message is read by staff, so be safe as far as the IDOC goes, rather than sorry.

Suggested Topics

- Artistic expression: Are you writing, doing art, writing songs, or anything else to express yourself creatively? Could the two of you collaborate on something? Ex: One writes a poem and the other creates a visual piece expressing it.
- Reading: What are you reading these days? Are there books you would recommend to others?
- Family: How big is your family? Who do you receive visits from?
- Health: How is your health?
- Reentry: If they are not a lifer, do they have a plan for reentry? What are their needs in designing their reentry plan?
- Work: What is your current job and what skills are you using/learning?
- Favorites: What is your favorite song/music genre/music group/book/writer/film/season/sport/team/historical figure/quote/food, etc.

Sample Introductory O-mail or Letter

Hello,

I hope you're doing well. My name is _____ and I live in _____. I'm __ years old and work at/am retired from _____. I have worked/worked for __ years. I'm a member of the Unitarian Universalist Society, a church that is open to many different spiritual beliefs. Like many of my fellow UUs, I feel strongly about the rights and well-being of incarcerated individuals and am reaching out to you and others in order to offer encouragement and support.

If you'd like to write me back, we can talk about anything you wish. I'm very interested in hearing your story, what kinds of things you're interested in, hobbies, beliefs, your family, where you've lived, and other things like that. My family is _____. I was born in _____ and have lived in _____. In my spare time, I like to _____.

I understand that you face many difficulties inside. You can share about them or not, as you wish. I hope to hear back from you.

Take care of yourself.

Best wishes,

[Your Name]

Electronic O-Mails

It costs \$10 to set up an account and 25 cents per message. Go to the Corrlinks website at <https://www.corrlinks.com/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fDefault.aspx>. You will have to create a password on your first visit. When you login, it will take you to a screen of icons. To add a name to your list of o-mail contacts, click "Account Management," then "Manage my Inmate List." In the "Correctional Agency" space at the top, choose "Iowa" from the dropdown menu. Enter the ID # of the individual you want to write to and click "Go." You will be asked to choose your relationship from a dropdown menu ("Friend"). You have the option of getting an email alert when that person sends you a message; if you want that, click the box "Enable Email Alert," then click "Accept." Your "Inmate List" will appear with the new name added. Click on "Return to Account Management Menu" in lower right corner, and then hit the back arrow until you reach the screen of icons. Click on "New Message," then the "To:" space, which will present your list of inmates. Choose the one you want to write to, then click "OK" and you can begin composing your o-mail.

Hard Copy Letters

- All letters need the sender's full name printed at the end of the letter, and a signature.

- The envelope should have a standard return address -- your name and address.
- Address the envelope in the following way:

[Incarcerated Individual's Name and ID Number—ex. John Doe #333333]

[Name of Institution—ex. Anamosa State Penitentiary]

PO Box 96777

Las Vegas, NV 89193

(IDOC is now having all letters sent to a central location in Las Vegas where they are photocopied. Only the photocopies are distributed to the addressee.)

- Write on 8½x11" paper, on one side only, and on regular paper only. Do not use card stock, stationery, colored paper, or greeting cards. Do not apply any artwork, glitter, scents, or stains.
- There is a limit of ten pages per envelope, and a limit of one such envelope per day (so don't send 20 pages in two envelopes on the same day, or your correspondent won't get one of them).
- Assume everything you send will be opened and read by prison staff.