Creative Writing: Letter to the Front

Engaging writing means “showing, not telling”. In your letter home, you are “telling” the reader about the events that are happening to you, but the story is much more interesting if you can “show” the reader what is happening through imagery and figurative language. This language is not just for poetry, it is for prose as well.

This letter to the front will focus on these things:

1. **The Homefront**: propaganda, War Measure’s Act, enlistment, women’s rights and the economy. Show your reader you understand these issues AND your perspective
2. **Imagery and figurative language**: Appeal to the senses. Use imagery and figurative devices. *Show* your reader your experience, not just “tell” the reader.
3. **Sentence fluency**: use short sentences for emphasis, to show stress or intense emotion. Use longer sentences to show longer thoughts. Try to mix it up to be effective.

# Letter from the Front

[Canadian Letters and Images Project](https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-2858?position=9&list=qvSTQ10ClEeprhZMuBsCjIfEGt9N4ynHuc18J1PYJjM) (see website for more letters)

Here is an example of a REAL letter written by Lance Corporal Balfour to his mother back home. He “tells” more than he “shows” but it is informative and interesting.

**Follow the formatting of the letter below with an address, date and salutation.**

A11089  
L/Corp Balfour  
No.3 Co P.P.C.L.I. B.E.7.  
France. Thurs.  
Aug. 5, 1915

Dear Ma,

It is now 4p.m. we are going out of trenches to-night at midnight and will be in billets for 4 or 5 days. These billets are a couple of miles behind the line.

Last night we were standing- to most of the time. When we get the order to "stand-to" everyone must be out of the dug-outs with his ammunition equipment on. A sharp look-out has to be kept over the parapet- We hardly ever see a German. Once I a while we see dirt thrown out behind their lines. Three or four of our fellows have had narrow escapes, one had a bullet thro his hat another was stunned by a bullet very close to him.

We cook our food in mess tins. The fires are lit just behind. We have to scout around for wood. This morning after a few minutes search I found quite a large piece of board. We get the water from a pump 300 yds behind in the ruins of an old house. I was one of a digging part in front of the trench from 9.30 to 11.30.

There are quite a few flares sent up by both sides at night. They are to expose parties working on the wire entanglements or snipers. The trenches are much different from what I expected. There is a board walk placed behind and you can go along it to any part of the line in safety.

I think I mentioned that Buzz Hamilton was in hospital with a sore thumb. He came here last night and his thumb is much better. He says he had a nice rest in the field Hospital for 2 days. There were several rumours around this morning. One was we may go to the Dardanelles, another our division may be back in England in a month or so. The P. Pats are not in the Canadian Division but are part of a British division. I suppose you know that.

I was just called away on a little fatigue, carrying poles from the dumping ground (where supplies are unloaded) up to our right. There are numerous trenches running behind us, including the support trenches. The main communication runs back about 5 or 600 yds.

We'll go out to-night and I hope we have time to do a little sleeping. We don't sleep at night here only what we can get during the day.

I must close and have a sleep. Will write soon. Tell Mary I'm very proud of her in Exams. Love to all  
Your loving son  
Jim

**Example of a short story using figurative language and sentence fluency.**

From “Blind” by Mary Borden (a short story)

*The hospital throbbed and hummed that night like a dynamo. The operating rooms were ablaze; twelve surgical équipes were at work; boilers steamed and whistled; nurses hurried in and out of the sterilizing rooms carrying big shining metal boxes and enamelled trays; feet were running, slower feet, shuffling. The hospital was going full steam ahead. I had a sense of great power, exhilaration and excitement. A loud wind was howling. It was throwing itself like a pack of wolves against the flimsy wooden walls, and the guns were growling. Their voices were dying away. I thought of them as a pack of beaten dogs, slinking away across the dark waste where the dead were lying and the wounded who had not yet been picked up, their only cover the windy blanket of the bitter November night.*

*And I was happy. It seemed to me that the crazy crowded bright hot shelter was a beautiful place. I thought, "This is the second battlefield. The battle now is going on over the helpless bodies of these men. It is we who are doing the fighting now, with their real enemies." And I thought of the chief surgeon, the wizard working like lightning through the night, and all the others wielding their flashing knives against the invisible enemy. The wounded had begun to arrive at noon. It was now past midnight, and the door kept opening and shutting to let in the stretcher-bearers, and the ambulances kept lurching in at the gate. Lanterns were moving through the windy dark from shed to shed. The nurses were out there in the scattered huts, putting the men to bed when they came over the dark ground, asleep, from the operating rooms. They would wake up in clean warm beds---those who did wake up.*

Assessment: /10

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Below Target | Target | Exceeds Target |
|  | -figurative language is used well  -imagery is present  - a mix of long and short sentences used effectively  -common conventions in English are followed  -shows an understanding of the perspective of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  -correct historical information  -shows insight into history |  |