

PARTICIPANTS GUIDE 2026

In 2026, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) is partnering with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the 55th International Letter-Writing Competition for Young People. This collaboration brings together the UPU's mission to connect people through the post, WHO's work on health including physical, mental and social well-being, and UNESCO's commitment to education and the social dimensions of digital transformation, inviting young people to reflect on how meaningful human connection can be nurtured in a digital world where technology shapes the way people relate to one another.

Together, we invite young people worldwide to reflect on their own friendships and communities, and on how simple acts of communication, such as writing a letter to a friend, can foster empathy, kindness and understanding, as well as a sense of belonging in a digital world.

The theme for this year is:

**WRITE A LETTER
TO A FRIEND
ABOUT WHY HUMAN
CONNECTION MATTERS
IN A DIGITAL WORLD.**



Messages from the organizer and partners

UPU

The UPU is a United Nations specialized agency founded in 1874 that helps connect people around the world through the mail. Working with 192 member countries, the UPU ensures that letters and packages can travel safely and efficiently from one place to another. It also sets international rules for the postal system so that everyone, everywhere has access to reliable communication. Through initiatives like this letter-writing competition, we promote writing, literacy and cultural exchange, encouraging young people to reflect on why staying connected with one another matters and how communication can help address shared global challenges.

WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) works across all regions to protect and improve people's physical, mental and social health. We bring together governments and wider stakeholders from 194 countries to address today's most pressing health challenges. One of these challenges may come as a surprise: loneliness. WHO research shows that around one in five young people feels lonely, with serious consequences for mental and physical health. Loneliness also affects broader well-being – for example, how well young people do at school and, in future, at work – and places real social and economic costs on communities and societies. In 2025, WHO Member States recognized this for the first time by adopting a resolution on social connection as a public health priority. That is why WHO has joined the UPU for this year's competition. We believe young people's voices can help reshape how the world understands connection, empathy and well-being.

UNESCO

In today's digital world, while staying connected is easier than ever, meaningful human connections become fragile – especially for young people. Through its Youth Programme, UNESCO places youth well-being and engagement at the heart of its work. Normative standards like the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence promote rights-based technologies that are inclusive and enable trust and connections. Youth focused initiatives like the Master Class series against Racism and Discrimination nurture awareness, respect, empathy, and equality, while challenging hate and exclusion, also in the digital spaces. Through its partnership with the UPU, UNESCO supports this competition as a platform for young people to engage and use writing as a creative means to reflect on human relationships and the foundations sustaining societies in a digital age.

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD LETTER?

A well-written letter includes the following elements:

Heading (complete address of writer and the date of the letter)

Greeting (Dear, etc.)

Body

WRITE A LETTER TO A FRIEND
ABOUT WHY HUMAN CONNECTION
MATTERS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Complimentary close

Postscript (optional)

Signature line

IN NEED OF INSPIRATION FOR THE THEME?

- FAQ: Social connection – what it is, why it matters, and what you can do:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/social-connection>
- WHO Commission on Social Connection report – plain language summary:
<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/from-loneliness-to-social-connection-summary>
- The Social Connection Series – short films on lived experiences:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9S6xGsoqIBUqjIzow3VxmDXj77JrkyT&si=R7AZ54W0jeBSJrtk>
- Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: <https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics>
- Master Class Series against Racism and Discriminations:
<https://www.unesco.org/en/no-racism-no-discrimination/masterclass>

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Send your letter to:

(Space for national organizer to put basic information about where compositions must be sent and contact information)

To validate your candidature, along with your composition, please include a **cover letter** with the following information:

Your name

Your email address

Your postal address

Your age and date of birth

Number of words in your letter [maximum 800]

Your consent for the use of photos submitted to UPU

For more information about the UPU International Letter-Writing Competition for Young People, please visit the following website:

UPU.INT/EN/ILWC

ILWC BACKGROUND

Every year since 1971, the UPU, the United Nations specialized agency for postal services, has held an International Letter-Writing Competition for Young People.

Millions of youths around the world have participated in the competition, practicing the valuable art of letter-writing by expressing their thoughts on topics and issues that concern the world at large.

Despite living in a digital age, learning how to express oneself properly through the written word is an ability that every young person should nurture to grow personally and prepare for the future. By participating in this competition, you help us advocate for goal four on "Quality Education" under the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For more information, please consult the following website:

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



So, take part in this exciting competition. If your letter wins at the national level, it could end up being selected as the year's top letter at the international level and you could win some fantastic prizes.

COMPETITION RULES

Compositions must be in the form of a letter and contain the elements of a letter (heading, greeting, body, complimentary close, signature line and postscript (optional)).

Entries must adhere strictly to the theme and not exceed 800 words in the original language.

Submitted letters must be accompanied by a cover letter, entry form and high quality picture of the winner.



HOW THE COMPETITION WORKS

Only young participants from 9 to 15 years (inclusive) may take part in the annual competition. To be eligible, participants must be 15 years old or younger on the submission deadline of 5 May 2026. This includes participants who turn 16 on that date or after it. Participants who turn 16 before 5 May 2026 are not eligible.

Country selects the best national.

Each country sends its first-prize letter to then compete for the top prizes at the international level.

An international jury evaluates the letters and selects top three winners and up to five special mentions.

If conditions permit, the UPU will sponsor the top winner and one accompanying adult to attend a special awards ceremony, covering travel and accommodation.

JURY DESIGNATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

An international jury compiled by the UPU International Bureau judges the letters and selects the overall winners and candidates that merit a special mention.

Winners and member countries are informed of the results.-

UPU announces winners through website and social media channels.

PRIZES

The top three international prize-winners will receive a beautiful medal (gold, silver or bronze) bearing their name, or a certificate (honourable mentions).

The runners-up and national winners will generally receive their prize at ceremonies held in their home countries on World Post Day – 9 October – the anniversary of the founding of the UPU.

"Participating in the competition was a unique opportunity for me to share my thoughts about the future with people from different countries. I'm glad that my work was among the winners. Recognition is very important for teenagers – it gives confidence, inspires creativity, and fosters growth. I am grateful to the organizers of the competition and encourage other young people to take part in it."

Aliaksandr Piatrou (Belarus)

2024 gold-medal winner

"Participating in the UPU competition has made my life better. My self-confidence has grown, and I look to the future with hope. I always believe I will succeed and am not afraid of challenges. The power of love is immense. I love the UPU family so much – it has become a big family for me. I now have friends from different cultures. After the competition, I realized that a pen and paper can change the world. Writing letters is freedom. Letters, like birds, cross seas and mountains. I want all young people to write letters, believe in themselves, and love others. Letters filled with love, knowledge, and kindness will save the world."

Esra Sümeyye Öz (Türkiye)

2022 gold-medal winner

"I participated with curiosity and left with courage. This experience reminded me that words are not just sentences: they are bridges between people, cultures, and dreams. Writing pushed me out of my comfort zone and into a space where my ideas mattered.

To young writers everywhere: don't wait to be fearless. Start while you're unsure, start even if your hands shake. Growth lives there. Every story you write is a step closer to understanding yourself and the world around you.

Endless thanks to UPU for creating a space where young minds can speak, imagine, and be heard. Take the leap, trust your voice, and let your words leave footprints where you once stood."

Reyyan Demiriz (Türkiye)

2025 gold-medal winner

"I participated and the experience was overwhelming. The whole experience was a roller-coaster of emotions that I will never forget. I was able to network and make new friends. It was amazing to meet Sarah the Robot one-on-one.

To my fellow children all over the world, writing is not easy, but I encourage you to begin somewhere. All great achievements require time. To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.

Thank you to 'UPU' for giving children an opportunity to nurture their talents/abilities and to shine. Take the challenge, grasp the opportunity, and make a better future for all of us and our environment. Try something new and discover yourself every single day."

Claire Gakii (Kenya)

2023 gold-medal winner



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