

Letters that say 'can't we just be friends?'

By DOUGLAS W. KIRK
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Dear John.

I don't know how to say this other than to come directly to the point. I don't think we should see each other anymore. I love you in a special way, but we'll have to remain just friends.

seems to have limited feeling, but the reasons for breaking a relationship are either unclear or largely absurd.

The third type is the modern letter which ends a relationship by asking questions, attempting to understand, projecting honesty, openness and a willingness to communicate. This type of letter is rare.

The classic and traditional letters are most common.

letter and may assume one of these arguments:

The inside look

"I got your letter Saturday and I didn't know better I would have thought it was the same letter I wrote to a girl just a few months ago. You see, I know exactly how you feel about me and this whole rotten mess because I've been there before. I know what it's like to feel something for a person and then they don't seem to care about it or you or anything . . ."

"It is hard for me to tell you how I feel because I don't really know. I know I have said this before, but I truly don't know what to say anymore . . ."

"Before our emotions turn to hatred, let's be mature enough to admit that our relationship is no longer the same. If we end things now we will be able to remember the fun we had unscarred with bitterness . . ."

"Please don't try to call me or write me and try to straighten things out. It won't do any good . . ."

Dear John letters ring out across the college campus, most of them opening with "I" and all of them raising a topic that usually has emotional impact upon the receiver.

It is strange how so many people in this world address their letters to that unpopular little fellow to whom most of us refer forbiddingly as "John." "Dear John," they begin, "I dig you but . . ." and thus another promising relationship is dissolved and two individuals go their separate ways to play the game of love once again.

No one seems to know when the first Dear John letter was written. No doubt the initial letter was sent by some queen in Medieval times to her king. Obviously, the two had broken physical nearness due to a war or a sailing ship or maybe an old fashioned poker game. This parting of company probably gave the queen a chance to play the field while the king was out of the kingdom playing cards, and in time, she decided to better his poker game by sending him a royal flush. And so, the first Dear John was born and rumor has it that the queen's courier lost his head.

The last goodbye

Endings of Dear John letters also possess some quality of similarity:

"Please think about what I've said — I hope you're not angry, I'm only trying to be honest . . ."

"You've overstepped the boundaries with me and it's going to take time for me to feel about you the way I used to. I guess I just can't understand you . . ."

"I hope you don't get mad, but I'm going to just date a bunch of guys. I'm not interested in steady dating . . ."

"You move too fast for me. I can't believe you can love me after only one date. Perhaps it is best that I

don't go out with you ever again . . ."

"Perhaps it is about time we both admitted that we do not now and never will understand each other. I like to remember our relationship the way it used to be. In order to keep our pleasant memories it might be better if we ended our relationship now while there is still a little to be salvaged . . ."

"I hope that we will never feel hatred toward each other. I have returned your ring to your father . . ."

About the Study

Regarding the present Dear John study, Kirk, the researcher, re-

minds readers that conclusions based on the small 18-letter sample are speculative at best.

In order to further the research on Dear John letters, Kirk has decided to reopen his search for such correspondence. Individuals having Dear John letters and who wish to contribute to this study may do so now or anytime in the future by sending a photocopy of the letter with names blacked out to Dr. Kirk, P.O. Box 270, College Station, Texas 77840, or by bringing them by the Battalion office.

Presently, Kirk is developing a questionnaire relating to Dear John letters which he will distribute at a later date.

When was the last time you discovered a letter in your post office box similar to this one? That relatively common letter that is capable of stopping your heart momentarily? You tore open the correspondence and within the first line your girl friend wrote — Dear John, get lost—?

Well, some interesting research has been done on those letters, and surprisingly, they have some remarkable similarities. In a recent study involving 18 actual Dear John letters, it was found that the contents, the length, the method of signature and the time of year that such letters are mailed represent general trends.

Dear John letters tend to begin with the same kinds of statements. For example:

The beginning

"I have tried to put it softly in earlier letters. Perhaps I put it too softly because you seem so sincere and involved . . ."

"I've been trying to write you a letter now for over a week . . ."

"I hope you're feeling better by the time you receive this letter . . ."

"I don't think you're gonna like this letter . . ."

"I really don't know if I should tell you this, but I decided it's only fair . . ."

"I hope you're ready for this . . ."

Dear John letters are commonplace at colleges and universities. In the United States, a fellow goes off to college, and while he is making the difficult transition from high school, instead of getting encouragement from his not-yet-graduated girl friend, what does he get but a rumormongering, "I must say this before it's too late . . ." and eventually the world stands still when he reads, "Dear John."

Dear John letters seem to fall into one of three categories. The first is the classic letter, or the blunt, terse, to-the-point letter that does not explain why the relationship is being dissolved.

The traditional letter is one which

The length tells

A few general trends exist which one letter may have in common with another. A Dear John letter is almost always one and three quarters pages in length. It is a good rule of thumb that longer letters are deceptive: they often fall deliberately short of ending a relationship. More often than not, they seek to rescue it from destruction. Modern letters are usually longer than the other two types.

The content of Dear John letters ranges widely, but can be reduced to a few general phrases. One is, "I must say this before it's too late." Another, "You don't love me," or "You don't know me." "I can't see you this weekend," is a common statement, and the most frequently used is, "Let's retain our past friendship," or, "Can't we remain just friends?"

A third party, a discovered incompatibility for one another, a disagreement, emotional overkill, or unrestrained physical contact are reasons given in Dear John letters for the breakup. Explanations may either be honest personality conflicts, or simple fabricated extrapolations to blow someone off. The latter is the most painful.

Most Dear John letters end with-out a closing (i.e., love, yours truly, always, etc.) but rather simply the full first name of the writer with nicknames usually being abandoned for the occasion. The few letters that do have some form of closing are the longer, modern type letters and more often than not are those letters from which a relationship can be recovered.

Dear John letters have been found to be mailed during the last week or the first week in the month and are written in two periods of the year, with rare exception. These periods each follow holidays from school and are termed the early (Feb.-Apr.) and late (Sept.-Oct.) periods.

Reasons for a breakup comprise the middle portion of a Dear John

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