



## Dear Ruler: Letter Writing Tips for Exasperated Voters

- Thimali: Hi, Maeve Higgins.
- Maeve: Thimali! We're in the same city!
- Thimali: We're finally in the same city!
- Thimali: I'm so incredibly hot, but on the zoom recording, I have a nice sheen - Which is quite good.
- Maeve: No, you look wonderful. And I really appreciate you coming to the rescue as usual.
- Thimali: I'm always here to help.
- Maeve: We talked about this briefly as I say 'off air'. You and I are always wondering what action we can take and amazingly neither you nor I have ever actually written a letter to a politician.
- Thimali: It's quite weird. Isn't it?
- Maeve: Mhmm.
- Thimali: Why do you think that is though? Because we're both incredibly active in so many ways.
- Maeve: I mean, I think we care. It's just, like, for letter writing, it's something that I used to do when I was 14.
- Thimali: Yeah! Same.
- Maeve: Did you?!
- Thimali: I mean, I would write letters with friends that I was going to see like eight hours later, you know?
- Maeve: *(Laughs)* Yeah!

Maeve: Maybe we were just more communicative when we were teenagers. I didn't write to politicians, but I used to write to political prisoners.

Maeve: Like I was in Amnesty International -

Thimali: What?

Thimali: No, please. When you were 14 years old?

Maeve: I mean I was just, like, lonely.

Thimali: *(Laughs)*

Maeve: I would write these long letters about the problems I was having in school to people who were like, about to be executed by a dictator!

Thimali: *(Laughs)* What? Erm? Okay. I have so many questions...

***[MUSIC TRANSITION]***

Thimali: Um, confession. I interned in the parliamentary office of an MP, opening letters.

Maeve: Oh you did?

Thimali: I did do that. Yeah. I did do that.

Maeve: But yet you've never written one?

Thimali: I don't know why. Yeah. I just, cause what is strange is that he did actually read a good amount of those letters actually. But I have, uh, you know, done the sort of phone calls.

Maeve: I guess I've made calls to my reps here in America about gun control legislation and I've read the script off and spoken to one of their aides who's been very polite and said, 'yeah, I'll take that message'.

Thimali: E-mails - Um, yeah, they just don't feel that personal.

Maeve: Yeah. I certainly pressed that button on Instagram that like, you know, like you just click a button and it sends six emails automatically.

Thimali: I imagine all that quantity is really helpful in like, a, you know, critical moment. Sort of like a digital protest, isn't it?

Maeve: Mhmm.

**[MUSIC TRANSITION]**

Thimali: When we talked about letter writing a while ago, I started looking into it actually and millions of people do still write letters and emails to politicians every year. Loads of people, Maeve, except for us...

Maeve: Okay. So, let's give it a go. Let's write a letter. I'll write it. You can just tell me -

Thimali: We're going to write a letter? I love it. Let's do it.

Maeve: Yeah!

**[MUSIC TRANSITION]**

Maeve: So, um, the reason that I thought we could figure it out is that, um, something that I saw during lockdown here in New York really, I would say, grossed me out. I wanted to get it down on paper.

Thimali: That's good. Okay, Let's do it. Tell me, what did you see?

Maeve: So I was going for my daily walk, like a Victorian lady by the river.

Thimali: Promenading! *(Laughs)*.

Maeve: *(Laughs)*. I was promenading around with my parasol. I was looking into the water, you know, thinking this is Instagramable, 'look how cute I am?'. And then I thought it was like the sunlight on the water that was causing this movement. But it was actually all of these fish, gasping for breath, dying.

Thimali: What?! You are joking, this is horrifying. This is now where I thought this story was going.

Maeve: *(Laughs)*. I'm sorry!

Maeve: And like, I try not to be superstitious or whatever, but I was like, get out of here.

Thimali: Step away slowly...*(Laughs)*.

Maeve: Yep. So I looked it up, um, I literally Googled like “fish dying in the Hudson now!”. And I found some, you know, some information that was basically ‘yes, the fish are dying because of a lack of oxygen’. And that was to do with this heat rise that we've had here, um, in June and in July and this imbalance in the river as well as pollutants. Now Thimali, you and I both live here. So this is a warning. Do you want to know what goes into the river?

Thimali: I do live next to the water actually. So it does worry me.

Maeve: Yeah. Well they've definitely cleaned it up, you know, a tonne. But still, um, 20 billion gallons of raw sewage and polluted storm water pours into New York's waterways every year.

Thimali: No, no, no.

Thimali: Mhmm. 20 billion.

Maeve: And that's a really big problem because the river needs to be healthy. That's crucial to the environment.

Maeve: And it's really important to all the people who live near it.

Thimali: Of course.

Maeve: And it's right here on our doorstep. So I thought of a letter (like a proper, like an envelope and a stamp) that that might carry more weight.

***[MUSIC TRANSITION]***

Thimali: Okay. So actually, I think your topic is a really good place to start because another piece of advice that came across time and again, is that if you want to see change, try to keep the issue local to you. So obviously the health of our rivers is a global issue, but the local angle is really likely to have some solid impact.

Maeve: And there's elections here. There's an election coming up. There's another one in two years.

Thimali: Is there an election coming up?

Maeve: *(Laughs)*. Yeah. I mean, obviously I'm not going to write to, you know, the president.

Thimali: Why ever not?

Maeve: We're not speaking at the moment. So...

Thimali: *(Laughs).*

Maeve: *(Laughs).* I mean, I'm sure things will look up - we have this fiery relationship.

Thimali: *(Laughs).*

***[MUSIC TRANSITION]***

Maeve: I mean, Trump doesn't even read his briefs. So, like, I'm not going to write to him.

Thimali: We could try some of his letter writing skills. Did you see the letter he wrote to President Erdogan last year?

Maeve: Yeah. I do remember that.

Thimali: It was a lot of exclamation marks...

Maeve: Yeah *(laughs)*. And he ended the letter. Um, 'Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool. I'll call you later'.

Thimali: Oh my god. *(Laughs)*.

Maeve: That is how I should end my letter though right? 'Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool. I'll call you later. Fix the fish problem'.

Thimali: Fix the fish problem! *(Laughs)*.

Maeve: Okay. We're not going to write to Trump, but I have narrowed it down to Helen Rosenthal because she's the council member for, for that district.

Thimali: Get you, on top of it. All right, then let's start.

Maeve: Okay.

***[MUSIC TRANSITION AND SOUND OF MAEVE WRITING]***

Maeve: Dear Hel - *(Laughs)*. I won't say Dear Helen, I'll say dear councilperson... *(scratching out sound)*.

Maeve: I know what I'm talking about. Dear Mrs. Councilperson

Thimali: I write tons of letters...

Maeve: Dear Councilmember Rosenthal, dear council member Rosenthal. I recently spent a couple of weeks in your district.

Thimali: Promenading with my parasol.

Maeve: When I saw..

Thimali: And I swished my bustle around to the side. And saw a gaggle of drowning fish.

Maeve: Exactly.

Maeve: I don't know. Do you think I should put in a little bribe with it to make her pay attention?

Thimali: What, like a, like a muffin or a bagel?

Maeve: And after that, I'm kind of lost about where to go..

Thimali: Um, so I, yeah, I thought this might get tricky, Maeve. So I've contacted Mary from some -

Maeve: Fantastic.

Thimali: For some direction for you, uh, because who knows better...

***[MUSIC TRANSITION]***

Thimali: Hi Mary.

Mary: Great to see you.

Thimali: So Mary, letters. you must have got a lot of letters while you were president and I'm sure you still do, but is that something that you welcomed at all?

Mary: I got loads of letters when I was president, because we didn't really have any email. This was 1990 to 1997 and I have a great memory of one letter that thrilled me. The letter was from an eight year old and she began the letter 'dear ruler' spelled from 'R U L L E R'. 'I love your clothes. I want to be like you. Yours, Amy'.

Mary: And that letter stayed with me because it was, telling me that she wants to be president someday because she's seen a woman president, you know.

Thimali: That's adorable. Well, I have to admit that neither Maeve or I have written a letter to an MP or council member.

Mary: I'm quite interested, Thimali and indeed Maeve, that you haven't written letters before. It is surprising given that you're both active. You know that kind of virtual digital, lobbying is going to be more and more important.

Thimali: Do you think it is actually useful at all?

Mary: I do because if you're in political life and you receive seven letters, or now mainly emails, in one morning, you say, 'Oh my God, this is serious'. You really do. So it is worth doing.

Thimali: So then is it quantity or quality? Do you find with letter writing?

Mary: I don't think it helps to do the letter writing that sometimes is advocated, 'Write this letter, dear. So and so, blah, blah, blah'. That doesn't work because if you get too many, 'blah, blah, blahs' you just dismiss them. So, the more individual, the better, and it's the quality of the letter - it's not the quantity, but it does affect when you get a number of letters because they're saying Oh my goodness, people care about this.

Thimali: Does a handwritten letter make a difference?

Mary: I think it makes a lot of difference because they're quite rare now. It evokes an emotion that isn't there in the email. But if you want to respond to an event with shock, the email is quicker and you get there and you can get a number of people to write in and that's quite effective.

Thimali: Did you get any treats in the mail? Like if we mailed, you know, boxes of muffins and bagels to our senators and MPS, do you think they'd respond better?

Mary: No, it'd have to be much more than that (*laughs*). And that would be bad. That would be corruption in a big way.

All: (*Laughs*).

**[Music Transition]**

Thimali: I mean the climate crisis is obviously an enormous topic, but what sorts of letters do you think actually work?

Mary: I think the things that are probably more impactful, are the smaller. And even starting with the personal story of why it's affected you - in your family - stories are very impactful in letters. And I think even if you are disagreeing with the way that somebody is acting, if you can at least express some understanding and then say, but 'I do believe you're wrong in this' rather than 'you're wrong altogether and I don't like you', that's not a great letter. Very often you can achieve more if you're more diplomatic.

Thimali: Yeah. So Maeve and I haven't written any letters before, so do you have any good advice for us?

Mary: Well, tell Maeve not to go on too long, would you? I mean, long letters don't work. I mean, she wants to write a whole volume, you know, because she's so articulate and so expressive, but tell her short sweet to the point, for once.

All: *(Laughs).*

Thimali: I shall relay it to Maeve now.

Mary: *(Laughs).*

Maeve: Well, well, well.

Thimali: So much faith in you, Maeve. *(Laughs).*

Maeve: I love how she like has this veiled compliment within a total put down, like 'she goes on and on and on because she's articulate she will not stop talking'. Oh my God. Oh, Mary.

Thimali: *(Laughs).*

***[MUSIC TRANSITION]***

Maeve: Okay. Here's what I took from that. Do a story, a personal story about why you care about the thing.

Oh also, what she said about like, don't, don't be rude. Like, don't say like, 'you're doing this wrong and I hate you'.



Thimali: Be diplomatic.

Maeve: Right.

Maeve: Okay. So I'm going to see what has that councilmember done about river pollution in the past? Maybe she's been helpful there.

Thimali: That's a good idea. There's quite a lot of advice out there that I hadn't thought about. Actually, things like explaining clearly what you're writing about, but backing up your concerns with some stats and figures.

Maeve: Well, that's where I can say about the so many billions of tons of raw sewage and the heat wave.

Maeve: Wait, how did he? Wait to end the letter? What did he say to Erdogan again?

Thimali: He said, 'Don't be a tough guy'.

All: 'Don't be a fool'.

Maeve: 'I'll call you later' (*laughs*). Okay. So I have the ending. Yes.

Thimali: Yes. Um, do you think Helen Rosenthal will appreciate that?

Maeve: We'll see!

**[MUSIC TRANSITION]**

Maeve: Now comes the drama of finding an envelope and stamps.

Thimali: Do you want to send a comp copy to Trump? Just for good measure?

Maeve: Yeah I'll send a copy to Trump and I'll send a copy to the mayor, Bill De Blasio.

Thimali: Tall man.

Maeve: Tall guy. Hopefully it reaches them up there (*laughs*). Um, and I'll send one to Governor Cuomo too.

Thimali: Yeah. I think that's a great idea. Let's do a compare and contrast. Let's see how far these go...

**[MUSIC TRANSITION]**

Thimali: So good luck Maeve's letter.

Maeve: Good luck, little letter.

Thimali: And good luck, listeners! You know, it's a very good time to get writing. There is an election on the way. So join us. Start letting your local councilors and senators and Governors know about the climate justice issues around you and what they should be doing. And even if you don't have an election coming, there's no time like the present.

So we've got some more advice on getting pen to paper or writing an email on Instagram at [\*\*@mothersinvent\*\*](#)

Maeve: I'll keep you posted on what happens to my letter - *if* something happens to it. Um, and if those muffins get eaten (*laughs*). Although Mary said not to put muffins in, did she?

Thimali: It might get quite oily. And actually it might be bribery Maeve...

Maeve: Yeah. Okay, I'll take Mary's word for it. No muffins. Just paper.

Thimali: (*Laughs*).

**[MUSIC TRANSITION]**

**END OF MINISODE.**