

APBP: Pen Pal Guidelines

PO Box 601, Morgantown WV 26507 | appalachianbp@gmail.com | aprisonbookproject.wordpress.com

When the Appalachian Prison Book Project (APBP) receives a letter with a request for a pen pal, we forward that information to a volunteer who has, in turn, requested a pen pal.

There are many reasons to consider becoming a pen pal to an incarcerated Appalachian:

- Help bridge the gap between the “inside” and “outside” worlds
- Help imprisoned people stay connected with their communities and current events
- Help combat feelings of isolation
- Be a source of human contact
- Give someone something to look forward to
- Make a friend
- Be an activist

Things to Consider

Before you commit to writing a person in prison, we suggest first considering these questions:

- *Why do you want to write to someone in prison?*
Ask yourself what assumptions you may have about people who are incarcerated and how those assumptions may affect how you write.
- *What is your capacity?*
Consider how often you would be able to write to your pen pal and how long your correspondence will last.
- *How will you handle hearing about the prison system?*
Hearing first-hand about issues and experiences of incarceration may be different than you expect. It's important to have support systems (like APBP staff and volunteers) to handle trauma you may read.
- *Are you anxious about giving your mailing address to an incarcerated person?*
If you are not willing to share your mailing address with your pen pal, you can have them send letters to APBP's mailing address instead (PO Box 601, Morgantown WV 26507) and pick up letters from the Aull Center as we receive them.
- *Would you prefer to write to a man or a woman?*
Decide what is comfortable for you.
- *Are you willing to send money or gifts?*
Be realistic about what you can and are willing to give. Additionally, before you send gifts of any kind (money orders, stamps, books), check with your pen pal about what they can and cannot receive in prison.
- *Are you willing to devote time beyond letter-writing?*
It is possible that your pen pal will ask for help or information. Legal help and Internet research are fairly common requests. Do not feel obligated to do anything you feel uncomfortable with or that you simply do not have time for.

Instructions

To write to your pen pal:

1. *Commit to writing to one person regularly.*
Your pen pal will appreciate your consistency.
2. *Use discretion.*
Your letters can and will be read by prison guards, wardens, or even the FBI. Anything you write could be used against you, APBP, or your pen pal. Be aware.
3. *Know the rules.*
Ask your pen pal about the rules of their institution, particularly about what they may or may not receive in the mail. Prisons can and will reject mail for violations such as a mistake in the zip code or a failure to include a full name with the return address.
4. *Include the following information with their mailing address:*
 - Legal First and Last Name
 - Prison ID Number
 - Cell/Bunk Location (if listed after ID number)
 - Facility Name
 - PO Box, City State ZIP

Especially in your first correspondence, feel free to share something about yourself with your pen pal. Additionally, you can

- Ask them about life on the inside
- Ask them what they plan to do when they get out (*Note: Some people may be in prison for life or potentially be facing the death penalty.*)
- Ask them about their family and friends
- Ask them about their hobbies

Gratitude

We are grateful for your dedication to incarcerated men and women in Appalachia. Your pen pal will be grateful, too: Mail call often happens in public spaces within prisons, and when someone's name is called, it reminds them that people on the "outside" care about them.

Thank you for caring, and please email APBP (apisonbookproject@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns.