



HEARTLAND BAPTIST MISSIONS

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Here at Heartland Baptist Missions, we have the honor of reading dozens of hardcopy prayer letters and their contemporary equivalent in the form of emails and blog posts. We've read excellent missionary communication from people who do not consider themselves to be writers, but we've had a hard time finishing some newsletters from those who are capable of much better communication. To help, I want to give five Dos and five Don'ts for written missionary communication. The two lists are far from exhaustive, but should offer a good primer for pre-field missionaries as well as those already on the field.

DOS IN WRITTEN MISSIONARY COMMUNICATION

1. Keep Prayer letters or blog posts to 600 words, 500 is better, and send them **out regularly**. Occasionally, there will be a reason to write more, but it is difficult to hold people's attention for more than a few minutes.
2. Provide a **call to action**. Missionary communication is to keep prayer and financial supporters updated, so explaining how they can respond is expected. Be sure to include contact information, clear prayer points, and a link to where to send support.
3. Remember to directly **thank prayer and financial partners** for their part in the work God has called you to.
4. **Strike a balance between ministry updates and personal updates**. People and churches generally get behind the people they know, so report a balance of what God is doing *in you*, as much as *through you*.
5. **Use pictures**, but use good pictures. A couple of excellent pictures help bring readers into the ministry, but too many technically poor pictures take away from the message.

DON'TS IN WRITTEN MISSIONARY COMMUNICATION

1. It is **not good to begin** missionary communication **with an apology** for not communicating more often. "Sorry, it's been so long since we've been written," may be true, but simply communicating is better than excuses.
2. **Never go negative**. This is not to suggest hiding trials and hardships, but missionary communication is not the place to vent or communicate challenges with teammates or make it sound like the work is overwhelming. Missionary communication is primarily a place to share the wonderful works of God with those who have partnered with you in ministry.
3. **Do not publish without asking for a ministry partner to proofread** your communication. Even the best writers have typos and style errors. Good online resources include [Grammarly online/desktop](#), Grammar Girl, and Grammarbook.
4. Consistently overwhelming prayer and financial supporters with needs will cause some to shut down. While it is good to **share real needs**, donor fatigue can set in when every missionary communication feels like an ongoing plea to help in a crisis.
5. **Violating privacy** and using people can be unintended, but it is easy to do in written missionary communication. Sharing private details about nationals may not seem wrong, but to them, it could be shameful and feel like gossip. The same goes for sharing news about your team and mission organization. Consider asking key national and team leaders to read your posts before publishing.

Each of these points could be expanded, and several other points could be added. My hope was to begin a purposeful and thoughtful conversation to help pre-field missionaries set goals for their written communication.