

101 **Letterboxing**

*Basic Letterboxing
Etiquette and Definitions*

BY SOJOURNER

Letterboxing 101 Basic

A GOOD BASIC RULE OF THUMB

Treat everyone's letterbox as though it were your own!

SEARCHING FOR A LETTERBOX

While looking for a letterbox, remember to leave the area just as, or better than you found it. If you look under a rock, replace the rock where you found it. Don't pull out plants or rip up the ground looking for a letterbox. Avoid trampling vegetation while searching for the letterbox. Don't tear apart that stone wall that has withstood hundreds of years of time to find the box. Be discreet while searching if other people are around. You may need to postpone retrieving a box if you can't do it without being seen. Remember - not everyone is "letterbox-friendly" and you should not jeopardize someone else's letterbox.

FINDING A LETTERBOX

Carry it away from the hiding place when you stamp-in so as not to reveal the hiding place to passers-by, or to draw attention to what you are doing. Make sure you are discreet when unpacking the contents of the box and stamping-in.

RECLOSING A LETTERBOX

After stamping in, make sure the plastic bags are securely closed to keep moisture out. If there are 2 bags in the box, the logbook is what should be double-bagged since it has the most potential for becoming damaged. Rewrap the stamp in a paper towel. Make sure too that the lid of the container is snapped on tightly.

REHIDING A LETTERBOX

After finding a letterbox, rehide it as well as or better than you originally found it. Again, discretion at this time is very important. It is a good idea to cover the box with a handful of dead leaves, anchor the box with a flat rock so that an inquisitive critter can't run off with it, and then put a few more leaves or twigs on top so it looks natural to passers-by. Look at it from different angles before you leave to make sure no plastic is showing. Never leave a letterbox out in plain sight!

Spoiler

When a letterboxer - usually by accident or through ignorance - gives away information about a letterbox that was supposed to be kept secret. Especially common when locations to mystery boxes are released publicly. Spoilers are very much frowned upon in the letterboxing world. What should be a secret should stay a secret.

Unpublished or Word of Mouth (WOM) Clue

A letterbox with a clue that is not publicly available, but are distributed by word of mouth. You might create an unpublished letterbox in your own backyard for the enjoyment of houseguests, or provide clues to an unpublished letterbox only to other trusted letterboxers.

WAIVER OF LIABILITY

Letterboxing, like any outdoors activity, carries risks. Poison ivy, sumac and oak may obscure a letterbox hiding place; snakes or spiders may live in the same nooks and crannies where letterboxes are hidden; mosquitoes, deerflies or black flies may harass you in the woods, and trails may be dangerously steep or rocky -- just to name a few common hazards. Be familiar with the LbNA Waiver of Responsibility and Disclaimer (<http://www.letterboxing.org/lbna/tou.html>) before you embark on any letterbox quest.

WEBSITES

www.letterboxing.info (Silent Doug's website)
www.atlasquest.com
www.letterboxing.org (LbNA website)

TALK LISTS

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/newboxers/>

A good list for new Letterboxers, "where no question is a dumb question."

<http://groups.yahoo.com>

for other letterboxing groups, type in "letterboxing" and you'll be surprised how many groups there are!

"HAVE FUN AND
JUST GET OUT
THERE & BOX!!!"
the words of
Mark Pepe

This list was compiled by Sojourner. Some of the material was taken from Atlas Quest and Letterboxing.info, with their permission.

CLEANING OFF STAMPS

Sometimes it's necessary to clean the ink off a stamp, especially if you've used colors other than what's provided. A wet paper towel will work, or an UNSCENTED baby-wipe - you don't want to attract critters with perfume-scented wipes!

FINDING A HITCHHIKER

When you find one you need to:

1. Record the hitchhiker's stamp in your personal logbook.

2. Record your personal stamp in the hitchhiker's logbook.

Before you take the hitchhiker it's a good idea to make sure the previous finder stamped it into the host logbook and the host stamp into the HH logbook. Always try to move a HH to another box as soon as possible. If you know you won't be out letterboxing again for several weeks, then don't take it, but by all means exchange stamp images with it.

Once you're ready to replace it in another letterbox:

3. Record the hitchhiker's stamp in the host letterbox's logbook (the box where you leave the HH).

4. Record the stamp of the host letterbox in the hitchhiker's logbook.

If you announce to the talk lists that you found and re-hid a HH, don't publicly divulge its location, as it should be a surprise for the next finder!

CREATING A HITCHHIKER

Hitchhikers tend to get more wear and tear than regular letterboxes. They're constantly being carried about in knapsacks from letterbox to letterbox, and then stuffed into containers. Therefore, when you create a hitchhiker, think compact and sturdy. You don't need to include any more than a rubber stamp, the hitcher's log book and some brief instructions and contact information - no ink pad, pencil or other items are required. You can choose to package a hitchhiker either in a ziplock bag or its own plastic container. If you choose to use a bag, be sure to use the sturdy "freezer" or "storage" variety or else the hitchhiker will sprout pinholes after a few journeys. If you choose a container, use a small one, since the hitchhiker needs to be hidden alongside an existing letterbox, and there might not be much room in the hiding place.

CONTACTING THE PLACER

The majority of placers like to hear how their letterbox is faring. Whether you found it in good shape, or in need of maintenance, it is good practice to contact the placer to let them know about your experience with their box.

WATERPROOF CONTAINERS

When creating a letterbox, use a sturdy, waterproof container, such as "Rubbermaid" or "Lock and Lock" brands, and make sure it is large enough to accommodate stamp, logbook, ink pad and possibly a HH if one passes that way.

PLASTIC BAGS

Keep the logbook dry by double bagging it in heavy "storage" or "freezer" quality ziplock bags. The quart size is generally a good size to use for a standard sized logbook. (Not the "easy zipper" kind with the little handle on top that you pull across - they don't last long and don't stay water-tight.) The light-weight sandwich ziplock bags are too flimsy. Stamp and inkpads should also be sealed in a single bag. The use of a large ziplock bag on the outside of the letterbox container is not necessary if the container is waterproof.

Letterboxing definitions

Bonus Box

A letterbox with a clue that is not published, but rather hidden inside another letterbox. Usually a bonus box will be hidden near the host letterbox. Sometimes called a tagalong.

Cooties

A relatively new type of letterbox where one tries to sneak around hiding the box on another person—perhaps in an open backpack or jacket pocket. Once you 'catch a cootie', you stamp in and try to pawn it off onto another unsuspecting letterboxer. Cooties are often signed into with the stamp of your thumb or fingers that you draw on to embellish instead of the traditional signature stamp

Cuckoo Clue

A clue to a letterbox that travels from letterbox to letterbox, usually within a small area near the location of the cuckoo clue letterbox. When you find a cuckoo clue, you should take it with you and deposit it in another nearby letterbox (or copy it down and leave it in the original letterbox). Cuckoo clues are not published on the Web, and should not be publicly discussed.

Letterboxing Etiquette and Definitions

Exchange

Letterboxers swapping images of their signature stamps after meeting on the trail or at an event (gathering).

Hitchhiker (HH)

A letterbox without a home. A hitchhiker is hidden with another letterbox, and the person that finds it is expected to take the hitchhiker to another letterbox. The ultimate goal for a HH is to travel afar. Sometimes the creator will specify in the logbook if they want it to stay within a certain state, or not to be taken to gatherings, etc. It is good practice to contact the creator to tell them of its whereabouts.

Microbox

An extremely small letterbox, usually hidden in urban locations where larger boxes are too difficult to hide well. Film canisters set the standard for a microbox, but any letterbox of an equivalent size are considered microboxes.

Mystery Letterbox

A letterbox that does not provide a specific geographic location in its clues. The seeker must first conduct research or solve a puzzle in order to determine the location of the letterbox.

Pace

A very controversial term that, depending on who you ask, means either one or two steps. When creating clues, it is best not to use this term at all. Use 'step' instead and everyone will know what you are talking about.

Parasite

A parasite works like a hitchhiker, except that it hitches a ride with other hitchhikers. If the parasite ends up with two hitchhikers in a letterbox, it can leech onto the other hitchhiker and let the original one go.

Personal Traveller (PT)

A special stamp a letterboxer carries, in addition to their signature stamp. The letterboxer requires others to say a secret code, answer a question, or do something special in order to acquire this stamp.

PAX Count

A record of boxes that a letterboxer has planted (or placed), found, or exchanged, indicated in this fashion:

P38 F109 X22.

Some letterboxers keep track of their numbers, others don't.

Signature Stamp

The stamp letterboxers use to identify themselves, both in the logbooks of letterboxes they've found and for exchanges. Also called personal stamps.

LETTERBOXING WITH CHILDREN

Children are often enthusiastic to "do it themselves", which is great, but adults should ALWAYS oversee that they are closing up the box properly and rehidng it well.

PROBLEM WITH A BOX?

If you find a problem with the letterbox – maybe the clue needs updating or the letterbox needs maintenance or the logbook is full – attempt to inform the owner of the letterbox of the problem. You may be able to dry out the box if necessary with a paper towel or replace a baggie or even put in a new notepad or index cards to suffice as a logbook until the owner can replace it. Carry some basic supplies for these reasons.

TROUBLE FINDING A BOX?

Do not ask the authorities about a letterbox if you cannot find it. While the placer should get permission to plant a letterbox beforehand, most letterboxers work under the theory that planting letterboxes is okay until they are told otherwise. In such a case, not only will the authorities be unable to help you, they may instead confiscate the letterbox!

UNABLE TO FIND A BOX?

Rather than contacting the placer and telling them that "your box is missing" when you're "sure" you were looking in the correct place, it is much better to tell them that you were unable to find their box. They are more likely to get back to you and maybe even offer a hint!

RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Care must be taken in both planting and finding letterboxes. While planting a letterbox, avoid environmentally sensitive areas. Do not hide a letterbox far off the trail where others will trample vegetation, flowers, or otherwise cause damage. Use natural hiding places for your letterbox instead of digging holes or moving large rocks. The same applies when searching – if the box is off-trail, try not to create a "social trail" by following where previous boxers walked, it's damaging plus it's a dead giveaway to the location!

INK PADS IN LETTERBOXES

Some letterboxers supply an ink pad or markers in their letterbox. Since not all do, it is wise to take your own. Same with a pen.