



Leonard M Zunin and Hilary Stanton Zunin, in their book “*The Art of Condolence*” identified the key components to a good condolence letter. We acknowledge their advice, recommend their book highly, and offer some highlights from that book for advisors.

A good condolence letter or note is one that speaks from the heart. Use these guidelines as a starting point for writing your condolence note or letter. What’s important is that you write what feels right as opposed to a script or a platitude. Most grief experts agree that a good condolence or sympathy note contains at least some of the following elements:

**1. Acknowledge the loss.**

*I was sorry to hear of your recent bereavement.*  
*I was very upset to hear of your loss.*  
*I wanted to write and tell you how sorry I am for your loss.*  
*I was so sorry to hear about the tragic circumstances surrounding X's death.*  
*I was terribly sorry to learn about the death of X.*  
*I was saddened to hear of X's death.*  
*It was with a great sense of loss that I learned of X's death.*  
*I was so sad to hear of X's sudden death.*  
*I am writing on behalf of our firm to express our sympathy at your sad loss.*

**2. Express your sympathy.**

*Please accept my sympathy for your sad loss.*  
*I want to express my heartfelt sympathy.*  
*X was such a special person that no words are adequate.*  
*X was such a special person and it must be so difficult to come to terms with the fact he/she died so suddenly.*  
*May it comfort you to know that so many people care and are thinking of you and your family at this time.*  
*May the love of family and friends comfort you.*  
*There are no words to express our heartfelt sympathy to you and your family.*  
*While there is nothing I can say that will ease your loss, I wanted you to know that I am grieving and thinking of you all.*

**3. Note special qualities of the deceased or the bereaved.**

*What started many years ago as a business relationship grew into a friendship. It was a privilege to have known him/her.*

*She was a wonderful person and I won't forget her thoughtfulness and warmth.*

*I wish to express my sadness at John's untimely death. I know your courage and family will help you through this difficult time, but if there is anything I can do to help, please call.*

**4. End the letter with a thoughtful word, an inspirational quote, a hope, a wish or expression of sympathy such as**

*"You are in my thoughts and prayers."*

Remember that *"Those who live in the hearts of others never die."*

**Note Examples**

*Dear Mrs. Smith,*

*It is with great sadness that I learned of John's death.*

*It was a privilege to have known him, and I appreciated our relationship very much, as a friend as well as a valued client.*

*I'd like to offer my sincere sympathy to you and your family. If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know.*

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*Please accept my sincere sympathy on the passing of X. Although he suffered for a long time, it is still a terrible loss for you, though in some respects a blessing.*

*I will hold you and your family in my thoughts and prayers as you move through the process of grieving and healing.*

*Dear Mr. Jones*

*Just a quiet word to extend our deepest sympathy to your and your family, and to let you know we are thinking of you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Dear Mrs. Smith,*

*We were shocked to learn of your loss. John's passing will be grieved by all of us here at the firm. I considered him a personal friend and I will always remember him with great admiration.*

*With sincere sympathy,*

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*We are very sorry to learn that you have experienced a death in your family. Although we do not know the details, we want you to know that we are thinking about you in your bereavement.*

*Please accept our condolences.*

*Sincerely,*

## Quotations

“The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in.”

- Morrie Schwartz

“Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep -- he hath awakened from the dream of life.”

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

“On the death of a friend, we should consider that the fates through confidence have devolved on us the task of a double living, that we have henceforth to fulfill the promise of our friend's life also, in our own, to the world.”

Henry David Thoreau

“Death, thou art infinite; it is life is little.”

- Philip James Bailey

“Death to a good man is but passing through a dark entry, out of one little dusky room of his Father's house into another that is fair and large, lightsome and glorious, and divinely entertaining.”

- Adam Clarke

“One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
and Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

- John Donne