

# LETTERLOCKING

## *Clever Folds That Kept Letters Secret*

### **BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As far back as humans have walked the Earth and wanted to document something, there's been a need to have discretion. The documentation of Mesopotamia was often encased in clay wrappers (envelopes) called *bullae*. Letterlocking dates to the 13th century in Western history, corresponding with the availability of flexible writing paper.

The actual study of this 10,000 year old document security tradition is fairly recent. In the early 2000s, conservator Jana Dambrogio, had the opportunity to examine documents in the Vatican Secret Archives. Her documentation and models of the letter folds became the foundation for what has evolved into the Dictionary of Letterlocking (DoLL).

The folding of documents varied greatly. Some senders could be identified by their signature folding patterns. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the postage for letters in the United States and Europe was paid by the recipient and was based on the number of sheets of paper and the distance traveled. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rowland Hill, an English educator, carried out an analysis on the cost of postal services and helped advocate for the adoption and use of inexpensive, prepaid postage rate based on the letter's weight rather than the distance of travel. The first postage stamps were affixed to an envelope in 1840 to indicate that the sender had paid the postage. Even though folded letter sheets continued to be used, the manufacture of envelopes began in 1853.

Today letterlocking is a field of study and a part of the book arts and papercrafting world.



## **SUPPLIES FOR CREATING LETTERLOCKING LETTER MODELS:**

### **Sheets of printer paper.**

No heavier than 32lb. I will be using 20lb. printer paper.

Optional (*in addition to the printer paper*): origami paper 6" or 15cm; 8.5 x 11 light weight sheets of gift wrap, book pages, mulberry, or washi paper

### **Bone folder.**

Preferably Teflon because it doesn't leave marks on your paper. If you don't have a Teflon bone folder, you can use scrap paper as a guard sheet to protect your paper.

### **Metal ruler.**

For tearing and/or cutting down the paper and making folds.

Optional: paper trimmer/cutter

***Having your paper prepared before the meeting will save some time but isn't required.***

**Model #1:** One full size sheet of letter paper

**Model #2:** Works with any size rectangle that is in a ratio of 2:1. We will use a piece that is 4" x 8"

For 8.5" x 11" paper cut 3 inches off the length and .5" off the length. Divide the remaining piece that is 8" x 8" in half. You will have (2) pieces that are 4" x 8".

**Model #3:** Works with any size rectangle that is a division of a 8.5" x 11" letter sheet or an A4 sheet. One full sheet and one sheet divided in half lengthwise giving you (2) pieces 5.5" x 8.5." This size folded will hold a standard ATC card [2.5" x 3.5"].

**Model #4:** Any size square sheet of paper at least 6" x 6" or 15cm x 15cm. For demo, trim one sheet of paper to 8" x 8" square.