



# Write a Self-Compassion Letter

## The best person to start practicing compassion with is yourself.

Writing a self-compassion letter is a form of writing therapy. It allows you to place distance between your emotions and a stressful event, and embrace kindness toward yourself. This exercise provides constructive space to learn that effective self-compassion skill.

On the last pages is a completed letter that may help you work through this process.

## Recall a situation in the workplace where you acted in a way that doesn't meet your expectations for yourself, or a situation where you feel regret or remorse.

- During this practice of self-compassion, you'll first **describe what happened** by observing it in the third person.
- Next, you'll **mindfully observe the event** and write a narrative that will help you to step back and **gain an outsider's perspective**.
- Finally, you will have the opportunity to **offer yourself forgiveness and grace**.

This tool is from

### Values-Based Resiliency in the Workplace,

a full-length course available on the Niche Academy platform in Fall, 2023

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## Describe

Writing in the third person is a part of the process. It establishes the distance we need to review a situation and acknowledge contributing circumstances, and our feelings, with kindness.

To write in the third person, instead of saying, “I feel remorse,” you would say, “She feels remorse.” Instead of saying, “I feel embarrassed,” you would say, “She feels embarrassed.”

## Here’s an example of writing in the third person:

*The library staff member was on the reference desk. There were two patrons in her area. These patrons lived in a group home and took a bus together to the library once a week. Both patrons had a cognitive disability. The man, Daniel, was blind and non-verbal. He enjoyed listening to children’s audio books and would smile, rocking gently, as simple, familiar stories played in his headphones.*

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## Mindfulness

Start with mindfulness by documenting and acknowledging your feelings about the situation without magnifying them. Try these prompts and feel free to branch out. Continue using the third person.

- They felt \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Their response to the situation was \_\_\_\_\_.
- That response was driven by \_\_\_\_\_.
- Since then, they have felt \_\_\_\_\_ about the situation.

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## Common Humanity

Next, acknowledge your past experiences, environment, and the circumstances that shaped your responses to the event or action. Many events will require us to act using skills that we have not developed strengths in. Individuals do not bring the same skill sets, or the same temperament, or the same life experience, to the workplace.

Take the opportunity to reflect on our common humanity regarding your personal situation and acknowledge human imperfection. In other words, we all experience negative emotions including shame and regret. No one is immune from weakness. We all have angry, fearful, irrational, and defensive thoughts, and actions. That's ok. It's a part of being human.

Try this prompt to get started, and then continue your acknowledgment of your past experiences.

- Their default in similar, or previous situations, is \_\_\_\_\_.

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## Self-Kindness

Finish your letter with self-kindness. Offer self-forgiveness and use the opportunity to remind yourself that this situation was not a final opportunity to practice more positive responses. Acknowledge mistakes, understand your responses, and grant yourself permission to move on.

Start out with these prompts and use these phrases to grant yourself permission to move on.

- I forgive them for \_\_\_\_\_.
- I give them permission to move on and embrace themselves with compassion.
- They deserve grace.

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## A Completed Self-Compassion Letter from a Real Life Situation

*The library staff member was on the reference desk. There were two patrons in her area. These patrons lived in a group home and took a bus together to the library once a week. Both patrons had a cognitive disability. The man, Daniel, was blind and non-verbal. He enjoyed listening to children's audio books and would smile, rocking gently, as simple, familiar stories played in his headphones.*

*The woman, Sheryl, was Daniel's library buddy, and the leader of the two. She was often brusque, but on that day she appeared angry. At the end of their library time, when they got up to catch the bus back to their adult foster care home, she was aggressive with Daniel. She began giving him sharp orders about how he should leave his audio books on the table, how fast he should walk, and how he should take her elbow.*

*Finally, Sheryl began to hit Daniel. She hit him in the chest, and she slapped him on the face. Daniel rocked back and forth on his feet and he made high-pitched noises. Sheryl looked defiantly at the library staff member as she guided Daniel toward the door.*

*The library staff member stood up and looked back at Sheryl, a familiar patron. She didn't know what to say, or do. The library staff member looked at Daniel and wanted to help him, but she didn't. The three were alone in that area of the library.*

*The library staff member remained standing while Sheryl aggressively guided Daniel out of the library, continuing to give him orders. The library staff member did not report the incident.*

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*Her response was driven by lack of experience working with people with cognitive disabilities, and a personal reluctance to get involved or take charge.*

*Since then, the library staff member has felt ashamed about her lack of action, even though it is many years in the past. She continued to feel intimidated by Sheryl on subsequent visits, and even when she ran into Sheryl at her custodial job in a local store. The library staff member felt that she had wronged Daniel by not protecting him, or reporting the incident.*

*The library staff member's default was to back down in the face of anger and become silent when others were becoming loud. She had been taken advantage of by angry people. She didn't know how to stop that from happening to her. She was afraid that Sheryl's anger would turn on her. She didn't know how to lower the temperature when other adults were behaving badly and so she rarely tried.*

*I forgive her for not protecting Daniel when he was being abused. I forgive her for standing immobile. I forgive her for not reporting the incident to his adult foster care home, or the library.*

*I give her permission to move on and embrace herself with compassion.*

*She deserves grace.*

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