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**Kate:** Hello, I'm Kate Colin and this is 6 minute English. Today I'm joined by Jackie Dalton and we'll be talking about keeping in touch the old-fashioned way. Hi Jackie, a quick question for you to begin with...I'd like to know when was the last time you wrote a letter to a friend or relative and posted it? Not an email, but a real letter....

**Jackie:** Well funnily enough, it was only about a week ago, which I think is quite unusual nowadays.

**Kate:** Yes, it certainly is because in this modern age of emails, texts, phones, Facebook and Skype, we seldom take the time to **put pen to paper** and write a letter. Can you tell me what 'put pen to paper' means?

**Jackie:** Yes, this is an expression which means to deliberately write something down, a letter, a story or a poem perhaps. So putting 'pen to paper' to write a letter writing is certainly becoming less common these days. It's quite sad because until very recently, writing letters had been our main way of communicating with friends and family and now the tradition seems to be dying out.

**Kate:** Yes, but now of course now we have so much technology available to us that we can communicate with people all over the world in a matter of seconds. It's so much easier than it used to be!

**Jackie:** Exactly, we no longer have to go to the bother of writing a letter, buying a stamp and posting it, we can just click a few buttons and our message is at its destination.

**Kate:** Later in the programme we'll be hearing from someone who still prefers to write 'real letters' rather than emails. But first to my question for this week, which is an easy one. When we talk about the postal service in the UK, we sometimes jokingly use a nickname. Do we say:

- a) slug mail
- b) worm mail
- c) snail mail

**Jackie:** Ah that's an easy one....

**Kate:** Okay, we'll check your answer in a few minutes. But first we're going to hear from a girl called Liz. See if you can hear what she liked about receiving letters when she was younger....

**Liz**

'It was having something that **came through** that was yours and someone **had taken the time** to write to you. And because no one else can open your post, it's really private as well and it's **exclusively just for you**. I found that really exciting.'

**Jackie:** She said it was having something that '**came through**' that was hers alone. We often use the phrasal verb 'come through' when talking about a letter or a parcel which is posted to us. For example, 'my exam certificate came through this morning'. She liked the fact that someone **had taken the time** to write to her. This means to actually spend the time to do it and she said that a letter was private and '**exclusively** for her'. '**Exclusively**' means for one person only, it's not public and often refers to something quite luxurious or special.

**Kate:** What else does she like about receiving letters? Listen to find out:

**Liz**

'It's so **tactile** as opposed to any kind of technology and because the method is so traditional and **long-standing** it just seems a lot more real'.

**Kate:** She said it's **tactile**. What does tactile mean?

**Jackie:** This means 'nice to touch' and I think she's talking about the fact that letters are real and you can hold them, as opposed to just reading things off a computer screen.

**Kate:** And **long-standing**?

**Jackie:** We use 'long-standing' when we talk about something that has been taking place for many years, a tradition can be 'long standing' for example.

**Kate:** So what do you think? Do you like it when a letter **comes through** for you?

**Jackie:** Yes I do actually, I much prefer to receive a real letter rather than an email.

**Kate:** Well, many people would agree with you and before technology played such a huge part in our lives, lots of people used to have pen pals. These were friends who kept in contact through letters, hence the name (pal is another word for friend).

**Jackie:** Yes, there are a lot of advantages to having a pen pal including the opportunity to practise reading and writing in a foreign language, to improve literacy, to learn more about other countries and lifestyles and to make friendships.

**Kate:** Many people are still keen in having a pen pal and often use a special agency to put them in contact with someone in another country they can write to. Another way of saying this is to **link up** with someone. Liz has a few pen pals - let's hear what else she has to say...

**Liz**

I've got 3 pen pals now – they're all based in America. The pen pals started through some research I was doing and I found the Letter Writers Alliance on the internet. It's like a dating service but for pen pals, they just **link you up with** somebody else and all you get is their address and then you just start a dialogue with them.

**Jackie:** She said she **linked up** with some of her pen pals through an agency which was a bit like a dating service! It seems to work though...some people remain pen pals for only a short time, while others continue to exchange letters for the rest of their lives. Some pen pals eventually arrange to meet face to face and there are even stories of some pen pals getting married!

**Kate:** You can still have a pen pal even if you prefer to use email....these are sometimes called 'key pals' as you write letters on the keys of your computer rather than with a pen. Let's have a quick recap on the vocabulary we've come across today....

**Jackie:** **put pen to paper** – to deliberately writing something down  
**came through/come through** – a phrasal verb we use when talking about a letter or parcel which is posted to us  
**taking the time** – to spend the time to do something  
**exclusively** – special or for one person only  
**tactile** – nice or pleasant to touch  
**long standing** – something we have been doing for a long time  
**link up** – another phrasal verb meaning 'to connect with'

**Kate:** And finally, to the question I asked at the beginning of the programme – the term we sometimes use for the traditional postal service is.....

**Jackie:** I said it was 'snail mail' as compared to email and the telephone, sending a letter is a slow as a snail!

**Kate:** That's right. Thanks Jackie – until next time.

**Both:** Goodbye!