

When people talk about the most important developments of civilisation, they usually mention writing. Writing makes it possible for people to send messages over long distances and across time. Imagine living on Earth 30,000 years ago. If you are good at drawing, you will scower the walls of your cave with paintings of your hands. If you are a good hunter, you will draw the animals you've hunted to show people. Such drawings are among the earliest examples of 'writing'. Thousands of years pass, and writing moves from drawings to hieroglyphics and then alphabets. As written language develops, people realise they can communicate with other people further away. They want to send letters. But if you want to send a letter, you should use a postal service. The earliest example of a postal service was found in ancient Egypt – a clay letter nearly 4,000 years old. The first government postal service began in China about 3,000 years ago, but people still needed something suitable to write on. Then, 2,500 years ago, the Egyptians discovered a light, portable writing material: papyrus. Soon afterwards, messengers on foot or horseback carried messages in Egypt and China. During the reign of Augustus Caesar (27 BC–14 CE), the Romans organised Europe's first postal service, but after the Roman Empire collapsed, the service stopped. In the late Middle Ages, private postal systems carried personal and business mail. People still send letters today, but if they want others to get their news right away, they send an email. 38