

During the time of Epicurus, who could read well enough to study philosophy?

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 9, 2026 at 1:26 PM

Google Query: was writing on or copying onto papyrus costly at 300 bc?

At 300 BC, blank **papyrus was a significant expense**, generally costing a few days' wages for an unskilled laborer. However, **the act of copying or writing** made books exceptionally pricey, as all texts had to be meticulously transcribed by hand. [1, 2, 3]

A breakdown of ancient writing costs reveals:

- **The cost of the material:** While the papyrus plant was easily cultivated in Egypt, shipping and trade markups made it an expensive commodity elsewhere in the Mediterranean, such as in Greece. A standard blank papyrus roll equated to roughly half its weight in modern printer paper made of gold. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]
- **The cost of labor:** The actual writing material only accounted for a small fraction of a book's final price. Professional scribes and copyists commanded high wages, driving up the cost of literary works and records. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]
- **Reusing papyrus:** Because of the expense, papyrus was frequently washed or scraped clean to be used as scratch paper, or written on both sides (recto and verso) to maximize space. [1, 2, 3]
- **Alternative materials:** For temporary notes, calculations, or drafts, people used cheaper alternatives like **wax tablets** or broken pieces of pottery and limestone known as **ostraca**. Parchment (animal skins) was also used, but it was historically even more expensive than papyrus. [1, 2, 3]

Google query: what did people use when they sent letters in 300 bc?

In **300 BC** (the early Hellenistic period), the materials and methods people used to send letters depended heavily on who was writing, the purpose of the message, and how far it had to travel. [1, 2]

1. The Writing Materials

- **Papyrus Sheets:** For formal, wealthy, or official correspondence, **papyrus was the preferred medium**. Unlike literary works that were kept as long scrolls, letters were usually written on a single sheet, folded up, tied securely with string, and **sealed with wax or clay** to ensure privacy. Writers used reed pens dipped in carbon-based ink. [1]

- **Wax Tablets:** For short, informal, or local notes, people used a **diptych** (two wooden boards attached by hinges). The inside of the wood was coated in dark beeswax, and the sender used a sharp metal stylus to scratch the message into the wax. The recipient could easily smooth the wax over to reply on the exact same tablet. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]
- **Ostraca (Pottery Fragments):** For everyday communication among commoners, soldiers, or laborers, broken pieces of ceramic pottery served as free, highly durable "scratch pads." People wrote on them with ink or scratched words directly into the clay. [[1](#), [2](#)]
- **Lead Sheets:** Occasionally used for highly sensitive, legal, or religious messages. Sheets of lead were hammered thin, etched with a stylus, and tightly rolled up. [[1](#)]

2. The "Envelopes" and Security

Ancient letter writers did not have paper envelopes. Instead, they folded the papyrus or wooden tablet inward so the writing faced the inside. They then wrapped a string around it and placed a dollop of beeswax or clay over the knot. The sender stamped the wax with a unique **signet ring**, creating a personalized seal. If the seal arrived broken, the recipient knew the letter had been intercepted and read. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

3. The Delivery System (The "Post")

There was **no public postal system** for ordinary citizens in 300 BC. [[1](#), [2](#)]

- **The Common Citizen:** Regular people had to rely entirely on **private networks**. If you wanted to send a letter, you had to ask a traveling merchant, a trusted friend, a pilgrim, or a slave heading in that direction to deliver it for you. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]
- **The Royal Administration:** Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, the newly formed Hellenistic kingdoms (like the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria) created highly sophisticated **state postal networks**. Borrowing heavily from the older Persian "Royal Road" system, these governments set up horse relay stations along major paths. Couriers would hand off official government documents from one rider to the next, allowing state letters to travel hundreds of miles in just a few days. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]