

Don't over-think simplicity of addressing an envelope

DEAR MISS MANNERS: How do you address mail to a same-sex married couple? I believe I should use the same formality that I do when addressing mail to an opposite sex couple, but I am not sure.

For example, if I know that one member of the couple has changed their last name to match their spouse and both are male, would I address it to Mr. and Mr. John Smith, using the first name of the one whose surname it was? The same question would apply to a female couple — would I use Mrs. and Mrs. Jane Smith?



**Judith
Martin**
Miss
Manners

I have the same question when the surnames are different, would I use Mrs. Jane Smith and Mrs. Jane Doe? When I address mail to a couple that are of the opposite sex and I am aware that they are married and have different names, I still use the Mr. and Mrs. Husband's surname. Am I correct in doing so?

I also am assuming the marriage itself made the information of their relationship public and I would not be publicizing what could be construed as something that is not for all to know.

Should I worry that someone would notice how the mail is addressed and be concerned that I could be bringing about difficult times for the couple, since in our society there are folks who would persecute others when they disagree with those who have married a member of the same sex?

GENTLE READER: Thank you for not contributing to the general rude-ing down (the equivalent of dumbing down) of society by chucking honorifics altogether. When Miss Manners sees a letter baldly addressed "Martha Dribbleport," she always thinks it must be

a summons.

Besides, updating old customs for new times happens to be her favorite part of this job. And there are formal forms other than Mr. and Mrs. from which to choose. In fact, that is the most awkward, although the most familiar, form since it does require choosing one given name, which unnamed halves are increasingly finding off-putting.

The plural of Mrs. is Mesdames and the plural of Mr. is Messrs. So a married female couple with the same surname would be Mesdames Jenna and Aurora Acorn, and a married male couple would be the Messrs. Jackson and Hal Thornton.

Then there is the two-line form, each name with its own title. This is used when an address is shared by unrelated people or by family members, such as siblings, but also to address married couples if the wife has a title such as Dr., Senator, Judge or Dame, or, you should note, if her surname is different from her husband's.

Miss Manners begs you not to concern yourself with the unlikely possibility that postal clerks have any interest in the marital arrangements of the public they serve. She reminds you that marriage is a matter of public record, and that to presume that others' marriages are better kept secret is insulting.

DEAR MISS MANNERS: This came up on my last vacation about getting up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom — to flush or not to flush because of the noise and possibly waking the others?

GENTLE READER: Consider the alternative: Such a nice greeting for the first person up in the morning. Etiquette sometimes requires choosing the lesser evil.

Readers may write to Miss Manners at MissManners@unitedmedia.com, or via postal mail at United Media, 200 Madison Ave., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10016.