

# Real snail mail

The pace of modern life is getting faster and faster. Everything is done in a rush: fast food, news as it happens, instant messaging. It seems like everything has to be done immediately.

Why not sloooooow down? What's the rush? Technology ought not to leave us frazzled. With a bit of ingenuity, technology (with help from some snails) can help you put things back in perspective. Just because food can be fast doesn't mean it's great food. Just because we can send our modern-day communications at the speed of light doesn't mean we have to.

Forget email. You've heard of snail mail – well, maybe even that is too fast. Add some unpredictable delay, just for the fun of it. Send your message by Real Snail Mail. That's mail sent on the back of an actual snail. It is now possible, thanks to a team of researchers at Bournemouth University.

When you send an email, ever thought how it actually gets from here to there? Your computer isn't directly connected to your friend's computer. Instead your email has to hop about like a frenzied hare, jumping from one computer to the next, making its lunatic, frenzied way to its destination. A nanosecond here, a millisecond there. Up to that satellite and back down again, and quick as a flash it's on the other side of the world. Got to keep moving, keep hopping, fast as it can. Even if it's not the shortest route, that's fine as long as it is the fastest.

Send your message by Real Snail Mail and one of those frantic hops will slow things right down. Your message whizzes up to the satellite, then back down at the speed of light. Down to a snail tank. Your message

then waits...waits for a snail to wander by. When a snail passes your message hops on to its back and the snail slows it all down. There is a drop-off point at the other end of the tank. When (or perhaps we should say if) your snail gets there, the message hops on and continues its journey to the destination. Until that time, it is forced to take it easy and just enjoy the ride.

It's all done in the name of the slow art movement. Art evolves as new media and new technology come along. The Bournemouth team have been looking at what can be done with extra small computers called RFID tags. They have a radio antenna so they can communicate wirelessly, and a simple chip that carries a unique identifier. That makes them small enough to ride on the back of those snails. When the snail arrives at the other side of the tank, that unique identifier tells the system which snail message has arrived, so it knows what message to send. Having had its slowed-down holiday it then whizzes on to the addressee, along with an overview of its journey.

So next time you have a not-really-urgent-if-you-think-about-it message to send, why not let a gang of *Helix aspersa* snails deliver it for you? Fred, Agatha, Sean, Penelope, Francis, Beatrice, Walter and Reginald can help add some tranquility to that otherwise frenzied life.

Find out how you can send your own Real Snail Mail message on our website at [www.cs4fn.org/magazine/](http://www.cs4fn.org/magazine/)

## Transmission Impossible

Impossible as it seems, you have the ability to control the future actions of others. You take a freely shuffled pack of playing cards, letting your volunteers freely select pairs of cards – it might be a red pair, a black pair or a mixed pair. When the experiment is over, you show that what they believed were free choices were in fact controlled by you. You predicted exactly what they would do! To prove these reality-altering skills aren't just luck, you repeat the experiment, and again show your inhuman ability to correctly manipulate a person's free choice.

How on earth do you do it? Find out on our website, [www.cs4fn.org/magazine/](http://www.cs4fn.org/magazine/)

What moves around and smells?  
Find out more in the magazine+  
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