The Letter Unit

Dear Students,

I’ve had over twenty years of schooling, been to college and beyond, and done a fair amount of writing over that time. I’ve written reports, essays, tests, assignments, journals, songs, stories, and scribblings in between the lines and margins here and there. Most of that was meaningless to me, except the songs and stories. Most of it was meant to prove my learning in some way when I had already learned what I knew. Now, when I reflect back about the most meaningful writing I’ve done in my life, about the words that have had the greatest impact over myself and the people I know and care about, I always come back to one style of writing that has had the greatest impact of all: the letter.

The nature of the letter itself has changed quite significantly over the course of my lifetime. When I was young, it was something we composed on paper, stuffed in envelopes, and wrote return addresses upon. When I moved on to high school, it was something you poured your heart onto, folded into a little square, then dropped on the binder of the girl you liked but were too afraid to speak to. In college, these letters took on new sophistications: dealing with issues of friends, families, long-standing conflicts and feuds, and so on. Now, as a professional with a career in mind, I write letters every day about procedures, maintenance, money, and *you* (well, some of you, sometimes). I still drop the occasional little square on that same girl’s binder too (in case you were wondering), though she’s thirty-six now and it’s no longer a binder but a laptop, and the note really isn’t a square but an email or text stating whether I’ll be home for dinner, and I that won’t forget to pick someone up from school.

So, I want to commit to a letter writing unit. I want you to write some letters. I want you to write lots and lots of letters. I want letters that start small and grow bigger. I want letters that start big, then shrink. I want you to write informal letters to your friends. I want you to write professional letters to multinational corporations, companies, government agencies, dictators, presidents and prime ministers, and, eventually, even me. Yes, they’ll be for marks. Yes, you’ll have some input. Let’s settle this now, shall we?

The Great Letter Writing Unit Criteria

You must submit an electronic package containing:

Drafts:

6 rough copy letters: 300-500 words in length. Time will be given each class for the writing of one draft. (6 classes).

I will check-off 60 marks when you bring all six letters to me at the end of this part of the project.

Editing:

4 of your letters must be

1. 2 must be lengthened by at least 50%
2. 2 must be shortened by at least 50%

Bring the original and second draft to me for an additional 40 marks once you’re finished this process.

Good copy:

3 of the remaining letters must be typed, formatted, and addressed with opening salutations and signatures. Place the best letter on top. I will be marking this for grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and style. The other two will be checked for appearance and completion.

Value: 50 marks

Time Maintenance:

Meeting deadlines is an important, though stressful, part of surviving in the real world. An additional 50 marks will be assigned for your ability to meet the due dates for drafting, editing, and handing-in your good copies.

Lastly, each of your draft letters must be addressed to a subject from just one of the following categories. You cannot write every letter to your friends. The idea here to practice using a different tone, depending on whom you’re writing to.

a) a friend

b) a teacher, principal, or family member

c) a person in a position of great power

d) a non-person

e) a celebrity (you may not use this option for “c”)

f) a complete fabrication (e.g. the excuse note).

g) other (see me for authorization)

Due dates:

Drafts:

Edits:

Good copies: