

Celebrity Letter Writing Assignment Practical English 12

A Word About Business Letter Writing

Many students have the impression that practicing good letter writing is only a necessity for students going on to become secretaries or those entering the business world. But in the years to come you will find that good letter writing is everyone's business. When you write or fax to a college, order theater tickets by mail, apply for a job through the mail, or let a newspaper editor or government official know how you feel about an issue, you will have to know how to write a good business letter that will do an effective job of speaking for you.

Unlike friendly letters and social notes, business letters are always written according to standard practice, there is a formality about them. The body of a business letter may be formal or informal in tone, but no departure from the rules is permitted in the form. Since the rules governing business letters are both more elaborate and more precise than those which apply to other letters, you should study and practice the structure carefully. Whether or not you get a response could depend upon it.

Project Goals

Your objective for this project is to create a biographical portfolio of three important people. These can be selected from a variety of fields, as outlined in the project below. Information about these people will be presented in the form of a brief typed report and will include photographs and autographs of the persons involved.

The Autograph

As part of this project you will write letters of request, asking for autographs of people in assorted fields. These should be celebrities or some other people of importance, as outlined in the project below.

An autograph could be one of the following:

- A signature (not a copy) of the person
- An inscription and signature of a person
- A short note, handwritten or typed, signed by a person
- A photograph inscribed and/or signed by a person
- A flat item (collector's card, bookmark, etc.) signed by a person.

There are other variations on this part of the project, so check your teacher to be sure they would be acceptable.

The autograph is an important part of the project and must be obtained through writing a letter -- autographs you have obtained in the past, though personal encounter or the mail, may not be used as part of this project.

The Biography
The Photograph
Important Information About Writing
A Letter of Request

A special word of caution is needed here about writing letters of request. Authors and other public figures have frequently protested in print about the letters they receive from students which ask, "Please write and tell me all about yourself as I am doing a term paper on you," or "Please write and tell me all you know about New Mexico."

Before you write to such people, check to be sure that the information you seek is not available in published form. After all, why should a person of import take time from his busy schedule to dispense information which is already available. Since you have to write a letter of request as a part of this assignment, follow these suggestions from your textbook: be very courteous; check form and appearance of the letter carefully (this will also be done by your teacher); make your request very specific; and enclose a self addressed stamped envelope.

In all cases, state your request clearly and briefly, and don't ask ridiculous questions. Public figures (or their staffs) are often handling a large volume of mail, they cannot afford to waste time reading lengthy, chatty letters.

Objectives:

- Take time to think about phrasing, in a letter of request -- formal wording, courteousness and discretion.
- Learn proper organization and protocol for a business letter of request.
- Study sample letters for correct form and possible ideas for inclusion in your own letters.
- Pay attention to detail, in writing a business letter of request -- spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Use the information obtained through letter writing and

research to create a portfolio which will include a brief biographical sketch, photograph, and autographed material obtained for each celebrity chosen.

- Discover resources available for locating people of importance in different fields -- use of library.
- Learn how the word processor (computer) can assist in creating the flawless letter.

Process

Before writing your letters of request to individuals of your choice, you will have to participate in the class assignments: learning how and where to search for important addresses, studying the business letter as it is presented in your textbook, proof reading and repairing sample letters, with your word processor.

Finally you will select three people you will write to. They should meet the following criteria:

- They must still be alive
- They must be or have been famous in their fields (Books, interviews, recordings, biographies, etc. must be available for research about the person.)

A rule of thumb might be that their names and faces must be recognizable by a significant number of people and/or have been recently in the news. Check this out before making a final selection.

- These people might or might not be important and well known to you. In any event you will have to research these individuals as much as possible before writing letters to them.

- You may select only one from any of the following

categories:

arts (music, theater, motion pictures, theater, writers, poets, painters, sculptors, etc.)

government/politics (public officials, world leaders, etc.)

science (medicine, space, electronics, etc.)
(Consider people who have won honors: Pulitzer or Nobel prizes, discoverers, inventors, for example)

sports (baseball, football, hockey, swimming, etc.) Again, consider honors: Hall of Fame, awards, for example.

Other fields will be considered for acceptance, but in any event you should clear your final selections with your teacher before going ahead with any information search or letter writing.

Begin your project by locating as much information about your persons as possible. Keep notes and try to find enough information so you can ask some sensible questions regarding the careers of these individuals.

Start your letters by explaining your class project and why you selected these individuals. Tell a little about yourself. Your letters should show a concern for the person yet they should not be patronizing or falsely worshiping. As a part of your letter you must ask for an autograph -- this might be an signature on a 3 x 5 card, an inscribed card, a signed photograph, or a signed letter.

Note: Some celebrities are aware that their autographs are sought simply for monetary gain. Make it clear to them that this is not your purpose.

Write your letters as carefully as possible by hand in the proper form. Also prepare the envelopes on a simulated piece of paper, as they will look when completed. Remember that you will have to include a self-addressed stamped envelope and a 3 x 5 card for the return, out of courtesy to the person you are writing. Bring your letter writing materials to class on the assigned days so that they may be typed on the word processor in final form.

Important writing materials will be provided by your teacher, such as envelopes, paper, cards, and a folder in which to keep your work. Postage will be provided for three mailings and three return envelopes.

Each letter and envelope must be checked by your teacher before it is mailed. A folder will be provided for you to store all of your information and for your final report. Be prepared to furnish your teacher with the following:

- The complete names and addresses of the people you are writing.
- Identify the sources of each address.
- Copies of the letters you are sending.
- The final project will consist of a folder that will hold the responses from your celebrity, a one-page biographical sketch of the person, and a photograph of the person.
- In addition to the portfolio of information, you will be asked to give an oral report in class telling of your experiences with this project.

After the letters are mailed, you should begin to work on your biographical sketches which will outline the life of the individual, pointing out the important events in their lives. This may be modified later when you receive some personally acquired information through the mail.

Information About Business Letter Writing

Information about business letter writing and preparing letters of request can be found in most grammar and composition books. Read these carefully and follow the rules to the letter when preparing your letters for this project. A suggested list of books for different class levels appears below:

Basic Skills in English -- Book 4
McDougal, Littell & Company
Pages 159 - 167

Basic Skills in English -- Book 6
McDougal, Littell & Company
Pages 151 - 160
Pages 170 - 179
English Grammar and Composition (Warriner's)
Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Inc
Pages 360 - 374

English Grammar and Composition (Warriner's)
Harcourt Brace Javanovick, Inc.
Pages 522 -544

Library Sources

Handbook of Business Letters L.E. Frailey Prentice Hall	Town Library
Business Letter Writing James L. Slattery Doubleday and Co., Inc.	Town Library
How to Write Letters for Alexander L. Sheff Doubleday and Co., Inc.	All Occasions Town Library
Random House Book of Contemporary Business Letters Stephen P. Elliott (ed.) Random House	Town Library

Finding Addresses

One of the biggest problems with a project of this sort is finding a viable address for the person you are writing to. You will probably be surprised at how accessible a lot of famous people really are and how easy it is to get an address through which you can contact them.

A few important sources for this information are given below, but a good search through the reference section in your local library will probably produce other resources that will allow you to contact any person of your choice. In some cases it is merely a matter of persistence.

Research Sources

Who's Who in Entertainment 2nd Edition 1992 - 1993	AHS Library
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Who's Who in the World 11th Edition 1993 - 1994	AHS Library
Who's Who in America 47th Edition Vol. 1 - 2	AHS Library
Current Biography Yearbook H.W. Wilson Company (Old Addresses)	Town Library AHS Library
20th Century Crime and Mystery Writers St. Martin's Press	AHS Library
Who's Who in American History Marquis	AHS Library
Who's Who of American Women 1993-1994 18th Edition Marquis	AHS Library
Contemporary Authors Gale Research Company	AHS Library
International Who's Who 1986-1987 50th Edition Europa Publications	AHS Library
Who's Who In Art 14th Edition Art Trade Press	Town Library
The Address Book Michael Levine Perigee Books	Town Library AHS Library
Contemporary Newsmakers Gale Research Inc.	Town Library
Newsmakers Gale Research Inc.	Town Library
Other Contact Sources	

Reference books such as those listed above are the easiest sources to use, but they are usually the most difficult to come by. And while the information they contain might

have been valid at one time, the addresses might no longer be in existence. Sometimes it is better to use current sources such as the following, if they are available:

- A book the person might have had recently published. While they may not give you their address in the book, you can usually reach the party by writing them care of the publisher (identified on the title page).
- The last place they appeared. For example, the person might have been interviewed on a talk show, or newscast, or other popular television or radio show. You could try writing the station, studio, or place of origin of this broadcast and ask that your letter be forwarded.
- Recent published biographies in book or periodical form. Often if you write the author of the book or article (care of the publisher), he will forward your letter via any information he might have.
- Places of employment. If the person is known to work for some studio, corporation or other establishment. Look up the address of this place (phone book, business directories, etc.) and write your letter care of this organization.