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# WRITING LEGACY LETTERS SYLLABUS

## INSTRUCTOR

Sara Orem, PhD

## PHONE

510-459-0239

## EMAIL

sara@saraorem.com

## COURSE OVERVIEW, SPRING SESSION 2021

In this time of forced isolation, when we are not seeing those we love—our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, old and good friends—we have all thought about what each of these significant people mean to us. The last third of our lives is the perfect time to conceive of letters, poems, artwork, and even lists that evoke their meaning. “It is a non-legal document that passes on important information about us and our ancestors to our loved ones and descendants,” writes Beth LaMie in *Legacy Letters from your Heart*. Also called an ethical will, the legacy letter began as a Jewish practice over 3000 years ago. The initial practice was an oral tradition passing along information about lineage and family history. More recently Stanford geriatrician and palliative care doctor VJ Periyakoil, MD started a written tradition with her patients and their family members to express forgiveness, thanks, and love. You will write the foundation of a Legacy Letter in this class, with help from Stanford Legacy Letter worksheets, Elderwriters’ suggestions, and writing prompts. No writing experience or expertise is required, only enthusiasm for your own legacy! We will write outside of class and bring our writing to each session. We will share our writing only if we wish to. The instructor will provide weekly feedback on work you create (while in the class) if you want it.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Stanford University Legacy Letters Project, <https://med.stanford.edu/letter/about.html>.

The Who Matters Most letter template from the above website

David Brooks articles on The Life Report

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/28/opinion/brooks-the-life-report.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/25/opinion/the-life-reports.html>

## OPTIONAL COURSE MATERIALS

- Elderwriters: Celebrate Your Life, A Guide for Creating your own Personal Legacy Document. Sue Barocas (Highly recommended)

- For My Grandchild: A grandparent's gift of memory. AARP (This is a beautiful workbook you can use as your legacy letter to a grandchild)
- Legacy Letters from your Heart. Beth LaMie
- The Gift of Love: A Handbook for Writing Legacy Letters and Ethical Wills. Dr. Melody A. Cofield

## RESOURCES

- Instructor will provide additional templates and exercises to get our creative juices going
- Videos of healthy older adults reading their Legacy Letters from Stanford Letters website
- Video of Flossie Lewis, local teacher of legacy letters

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Subject	Practice Opportunities
Week 1	Introduction to Legacy Letters Review of course process	Look at the Who Matters Most Legacy Letter template (Stanford Letter Project) 7 Life Review Tasks Writing assignment
Week 2	What are our choices of documents?	Other choices (poems, photos, stories, artwork) Writing sharing and assignment
Week 3	Particular topics for letters	Forgiveness, Gratitude, Reparations Writing sharing and assignment
Week 4	Particular Formats	Recipes, Lists, Advice Writing sharing and assignment
Week 5	More Formats	Who, Why, What, Reflection, Blessing
Week 6	The NO Writing Legacy Letter	Jump Starting Memories
Week 7	Putting it all together	Is it a letter, a scrapbook or something else.
Week 8	Sharing stories from our Letters	Organizing what we have