

# Writing Legacy Letters Syllabus

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## Instructor

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## Course Overview, Winter Session 2022

A legacy letter or document is a work you create that tells the people you love the most what you want them to know about your life: your values, your stories, and your advice/hopes for them. It can be as simple as a one-page letter or as complicated as a collection of short written pieces, photos, and official documents. “It is a non-legal document that passes on important information about you and your ancestors to your 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 both in and outside of class. You will share your writing only if you wish to. The instructor will provide weekly feedback on work you create 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
- Legacy Letters from your Heart. Beth LaMie
- The Gift of Love: A Handbook for Writing Legacy Letters and Ethical Wills.

Dr. Melody A. Cofield

- For My Grandchild: A Grandparent’s Gift of Memory, AARP

**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

**Course Schedule**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Practice Opportunities</b>
Week 1	Introduction to Legacy Letters Review of course process	Look at the Who Matters Most Legacy Letter template 7 Life Review Tasks Writing assignments
Week 2	What are our choices of formats?	Other choices (poems, photos, stories, artwork) Writing sharing and assignments
Week 3	Formats for Letters	Who, Why, What (story), Reflection (Learning), Love (Blessing) Writing
Week 4	Putting it all together	Organizing what we have Writing

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Week 5

How does this project change our lives?

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Week 6

Stories from our own Legacy Letters

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