

PASTOR'S COMPLETE MODEL



LETTER BOOK



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Pastor's Complete Model Letter Book

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Ten “Commandments” for Writing Better Letters

Guidelines from Scripture

Sometimes, the hardest thing to write is a letter. Whether it's a cover letter to go with your resume, a letter of apology, a letter of condolence to a friend, or a complaint to a local merchant, letters can be a challenge. You've got to say what you need to say in a very small space.

Whatever the writing opportunity is, it's a challenge you can easily meet. The ten “commandments” that follow will serve to help you produce effective and powerful letters, as well as other written communication.

Writing a letter sometimes seems an annoying task or a “necessary evil.” But it doesn't have to be so, nor should it be. When you sit down to write, keep in mind Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (NIV)

Writing a letter, a memo, or anything else should be a special joy as a Pastor because it's another opportunity to minister. It is in this spirit that the following guidelines are offered.

1. Be Smart – “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5, KJV)

Before picking up your pen or touching a keyboard, stop and think about what you want to say in your letter. Think it through carefully. The more sensitive the situation, the more care you need to take. The best help you can get is from God. Don't just think – *pray* before you write.

2. Be On Target – “Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.” (Judges 20:16. KJV)

Be sure you're writing to the right audience or person. Keep your reader in mind as you write. Don't send a letter to teens that was originally aimed at adults, and vice versa. Also, don't send a letter to an assistant that needs to go to an administrator or to a group when it should go to an individual. If you're reusing old material or boilerplate, customize carefully.

3. Be Accurate – “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (John 3:21, KJV)

A letter writer's effectiveness depends upon credibility. Be absolutely sure you've got all of the facts straight. Every situation has a well-

greased grapevine, and information is easily distorted, especially if it was wrong to begin with. Check your facts. Make sure you have the right names, dates, times, and places. When you're sure you're right, check again.

4. Be Coherent (logical) – “Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.” (Acts 11:4, KJV), “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Corinthians 14:40, KJV).

Incoherence or poor logic is a common problem in writing, so I've given two Scriptures to emphasize its importance. The easiest method of organization is to tell your story chronologically – in the order events occurred or will occur. If you've got several items or points to cover, outline first. If you can't rank them chronologically, rank them in order of importance. Number each item in your letter if necessary. Be sure to make smooth transitions from one thought to another.

5. Be Clear – “. . . do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7, KJV).

Keep it simple. Avoid using a long word where a short one will do. Just as God ignores heathen prayers loaded with “fancy language,” so will your reader! Other than observing the basic rules of grammar, try to write the way your reader talks.

6. Be Kind – “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.” (1 Peter 3:8, KJV).

Never write a letter when you're angry. If you do, don't mail it. Set it aside so you and your letter can cool off. Always be as considerate of your reader as you want them to be toward you. Try to see the situation from their point of view. We all make mistakes. Sometimes anger is a reasonable reaction to a situation. But always be careful how you let your anger be expressed. Conversely, avoid being saccharine or soft when being forceful salt and light is called for.

7. Be Yourself – “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14, KJV).

The moral of this parable is, don't put on airs, whether you're dealing with God or people. Be yourself. Be honest. Be straightforward. Don't use words or a style that you wouldn't use in a conversation with your best friend.

8. Be Brief (concise) – “Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.” (Hebrews 13:22, KJV).

Have a point. Get to the point. Stick to the point. And then sign off. How many two-or four-page letters do you read all the way through? Don't write letters longer than they need to be.

9. Be Willing To Revise – “But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.” (Jeremiah 18:4, KJV).

Seldom is any good writing achieved in the first draft. As all good writing, letters deserve special care, not only out of consideration for your reader, but also for yourself. Letters convey in print an image – your image. The more personal or sensitive or special the situation, the more carefully they must be thought out. Always have someone else proofread for typos, misspellings, and other errors. A little mistake can cost you a lot of respect.

10. Be Brave – “David also said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.’” (1 Chronicles 28:20, KJV).

While many are intimidated by having to write anything at all, it need not be a fearful task. With forethought and planning, anyone can write an effective and powerful letter (or anything else). Have an important letter to write? Keep these guidelines in mind, be brave – and do it!

All-Purpose Letter Writing Outline

The letter below is based on the AIDA formula. The letters in the acronym stand for ATTENTION, INTEREST, DESIRE, and ACTION. The formula is useful when applied to any kind of writing.

Keeping this formula in mind and using the following outline as a quick reference, you will have no trouble writing effective letters for every purpose.

Date (Month, Day, Year)

Name of Recipient, Title

Name of Company/Organization

Street Address or P.O. Box

City, State, Zip Code

Salutation (Dear NAME)

Opening. . . A brief greeting or introduction if needed. Many letters do not need an opening.

P1. ATTENTION – Gain the reader's immediate attention by stating the purpose of the letter. Why are you writing? Get to the point.

P2. INTEREST – Maintain the reader's interest by stating why you're writing to him or her. How is your reader related to your purpose?

P3. DESIRE – Arouse the reader's desire to respond to your letter. What's "in it" for the reader? What's the reader going to gain by responding to your letter?

P4. ACTION – What exactly do you want the reader to do? How? When? Where? If you're asking for money, how much? Or, what action are you going to take on behalf of the reader? In other words, how are you or the reader supposed to fulfill the purpose of this letter? Closing. . . In one or two sentences, restate your purpose in writing and the action desired from the reader. Then thank your reader for his or her time and response, and sign off. Many letters don't need a closing.

Sign Off (Sincerely, Yours Truly, Cordially, In His Service, etc.),

Your Signature

Your Name

Your Title

(If not included on your letterhead, type your church's name, complete address, and phone number here.)

Your Initials (uppercase)/your secretary's initials (lowercase)

P.S. If needed.

Tips for Using this Book

The most straightforward and obvious way to use this book is to find the letter that best suits your need, replace specific information, add your greeting and closing, but otherwise use the letter as is with little real modification.

These letters are designed to allow you to do exactly that. However, I strongly recommend that you more often use these letters merely as starting points. Effective letters will not only convey information clearly and concisely, but will also convey your personality. Further, you may add paragraph breaks as you desire.

Besides providing guidance for printed correspondence, these examples are easily adaptable for e-mail communication.

Another way to use this book is to peruse the letters and get ideas for expanding the ways you touch your congregation. Perhaps you've never thought about following up a miscarriage with a sympathy letter, or acknowledging someone's new job, or addressing the arrival of a newly adopted child. These are only a few of the ideas you will encounter in this book.

Some of these letters address sensitive situations that may be better handled in person or with a phone call. Having your thoughts in order ahead of time can help make the meeting or call go more smoothly. One way to prepare would be to write a letter that may not get mailed, or that can be used later to document and reaffirm what was discussed.

Finally, these letters can also serve as jumping off points for bulletin and newsletter articles, or even speeches and sermons. As you scan the pages, don't restrict your vision to just letters. You may be surprised the ideas that are sparked!

A note on special markings:

XX = Usually indicates a place where you would put a specific date such as 10, 21st, 13th, etc.

DAY = Indicates where you would put a specific day of the week such as Monday, Tuesday, etc.

MONTH XX, 200X = Indicates where you would place a full date such as March 29, 2010.

ADDRESS = Indicates where you place a street address such as 1234 Anywhere Lane.

CITY, STATE = Indicates where you would place a city and state name such as Boise, ID.

NAME = Indicates where you place a person's full, first, or last name based on the context of the letter.

All other markings should be self-evident.