



Write Your Own Epistle

Assignment: Write a 2-4 page letter of encouragement to specific audience, modeled after the writings of Paul, Peter, James, and John in the New Testament.

Purpose: When we study the letters of the New Testament, it's easy to forget the process the authors went through in writing them. Writing your own epistle is meant to help you: 1) appreciate the time, thought, and love that went into each of these letters, and 2) remind you that as a Christian, you have an obligation to encourage your fellow believers. It's easy to put the authors of the New Testament on a spiritual pedestal, but the truth is, we should all be about to articulate our faith and help other Christians grow spiritually.

For this assignment, you will need:

- ❑ **An intended audience:** This letter should be written to a specific individual or group of people who are currently part of your life. This could be your church youth group or small group, younger siblings or cousins, your Veritas class, or any other group of Christians over whom you could have some influence.
- ❑ **A purpose:** For every epistle, we talked about the “why” behind Paul’s (or Peter’s, James’, or John’s) writing. They never write just to check in or make small talk; they always have a specific purpose. For the Corinthians, Paul had a whole list of topics to address. For the Galatians, Paul was concerned mainly about one thing, their turning back to the Law instead of holding on to faith in Christ. What is it that you want to share with your audience? What do *they* need to hear on their faith journey? Is it several different ideas, or one main concept? Finding your audience and purpose are critical; these steps will determine how your letter proceeds.
- ❑ **A faith-based reasoning behind your purpose:** The first half of Paul’s letters typically contain the reasoning behind his “why.” He explains his beliefs about God and faith using details from his own life, Old Testament scripture, and basic reasoning. Whatever it is you are wanting to share in your letter, you will need to explain how your understanding of God shapes your purpose in writing. For example, if you are encouraging your youth group to be bolder in their faith, *why* do you believe they should be bolder in their faith? What beliefs about God and His purposes do you hold that make you think boldness is important? What Scriptures make you think that? What personal experiences have helped you be bolder, or have helped you understand the need for boldness?
- ❑ **A practical application section:** In the second half of Paul’s letters, he gives practical instructions. What practical suggestions would you give to your audience? How would you encourage them to grow and be more like Christ? Are there any specific behaviors, habits, or practices you would encourage? Any thoughts on how to act in specific situations?

Formatting: Your letter should have a typical assignment heading and should be typed and double-spaced, using 12 point, Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri font.

Structurally, your letter should start with a **greeting** which identifies both you and your audience. The remainder should be roughly divided into a **faith-based reasoning half**, and a **practical application half**. In your faith-based reasoning half, you can use personal experience and reflection, Scripture, examples, and even prayers as you seek to explain your beliefs to your audience. Your practical application half could include lists of virtues to emulate or behaviors to avoid, specific scenarios with instructions on how to respond, descriptions of what healthy relationships or interactions look like (think Paul’s household codes, but adapted to your specific circumstances. How should your audience treat their friends? Their parents? Their youth minister? You don’t have to cover all these relationships; these are just examples).

Tips:

- The first step in writing this epistle is to identify your audience and to spend some time reflecting what it is you would like them to know and why. In practice, your “practical application” section might come to you first: what is it you want to encourage your audience to do or to avoid? From there, you need to discern your reasoning: *why*, from a faith perspective, do you want to encourage or discourage these behaviors?
- Look to the New Testament letters for inspiration. You don’t have to intentionally copy Paul’s style (although you can, if that would help). Rather, look at the way he articulates his beliefs as an inspiration for you articulate *your* beliefs. Look at his practical instruction for tips on how to format your own practical instruction.
- Also consider the rubric below and the sample letters to help guide you as you write.
- As always, while your letter should be personal, it should also be respectful. As Paul did, you can show your personality, but this should not be a jokey or overly casual letter. All of the New Testament letters share an earnestness: what the authors wrote *mattered* to them, and they deeply hoped their words would be received by their audience because they loved their audience and wanted what was best for them. Your letter should be written in the same spirit.
- Remember that the ultimate purpose of writing your epistle is to inspire and encourage your audience in their walk with God.

Grading Rubric	Points	Possible
Formatting and Length		15
Greeting and Intended Audience		5
Appropriate Tone: Shows personality, but also respectful of faith and of audience		10
Faith-based reasoning section:		
• Clearly articulated purpose in writing the letter		10
• Strong theological argument backing purpose		15
• Compelling use of examples, Scripture, and/or personal anecdotes		10
Practical application section:		
• Includes examples of specific behaviors to practice/avoid		15
• Practical application naturally flows from earlier reasoning		10
• Practical instructions are achievable, encouraging		10
Total:		100