WRITING A ‘LEGACY LETTER’
OLLI at UC
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What is a legacy letter?

- A personal statement that you share with loved ones and preserve for future generations
- An opportunity to reflect on your life lessons, express your values and transmit your blessings
What is an ethical will?

- Another name for a legacy letter
- Different from a legal will and testament
- A gift to yourself and your loved ones
Questions to Ask Yourself

• What are my values?

• What are my most important life lessons?

• What am I proud of?

• Who am I grateful to? What am I grateful for?

• What are my regrets?
Writing Exercise: Linking the Generations
Six Elements of a Legacy Letter

1. Introduction
2. Tell your story
3. Share your values
4. Express gratitude
5. Reflect on your regrets
6. Offer blessings and guidance
I. Introduction

- Choose a salutation
- Why are you writing this letter?
- Why are you writing it now?
2. Tell Your Story

• What really defines you?
• Important choices and key moments in your life
• Lessons learned/insights
3. Share Your Values

- What principles and practices are really important to you?
- How do your stories reflect those principles and practices?
Writing Exercise: Life Lessons
• One thing someone taught you that has served you well
• One thing you’ve learned from being a parent
• One thing you learned from a setback or disappointment
• One thing you’ve learned from growing older or facing illness, grief or loss
4. Express Gratitude

- Who and what are you grateful for?
- How have others enriched your life?
5. Reflect on Your Regrets

- When did you fail to live up to your values?
- What do you wish you’d done differently?
- What have you learned from your regrets?
6. Offer Blessings and Guidance

- Blessings and guidance, *not* directions or instructions
- Be generous, wise, hopeful
Writing Exercise:
Shaping Your Legacy

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• “In their lifetimes, I hope the children I love will...”

• “I hope the children I love will think of me when they...”
Sharing your letter

- Before or after the end of your life?
- Let your recipients know you’re planning to share it
- Choose a special occasion that offers time to discuss it
Preserving your letter

• Be sure it’s not lost or destroyed
• Keep a digital file and a printed copy
• Print it on durable paper
Personalizing your letter

- Include a portion in your own handwriting
- Add a creative touch that expresses who you are
Audio or video legacy statements

- Technology has made them easy to create
- Allows people to see and hear you, not just read your words
- But a written document may help you to say something deeper or more meaningful