

## Writing Class Letters

Letters are invitations to share, explore, query, and continue talking. Letters are good places to try out ideas, see how they are received, and listen to reactions. Letters encourage doubt and uncertainty as well as candor ... You can assert in one voice then question your assertion in another and not be penalized for your confusion. Too often in thesis-driven writing, you are expected to have it only one way (or to pretend to have it only one way), to have one thesis to prove or support .... But letters invite the back-and-forthness of the doubtful mind, accepting the paradoxical and contradictory way the world seems to work.

- Ask students to write a weekly letter to the instructor. Formulate the assignment in invitational language (e.g. “Each week I invite you to write a letter to me about ideas related to our readings, writings, and class discussions”).
- Request that, at least once, students should include their classmates in the audience by making copies for all to read and respond to.
- Let them know that you will write a letter back to the whole class each week, and this letter will address most, but not all, of the concerns raised in the individual letters.
- Let students know that you may quote some of their comments (to think of their letters as “open”), and that if they don’t want anything mentioned they should mark those passages with “don’t publish.”

Based on:

Toby Fulwiler, “Writing Back and Forth: Class Letters.” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 69 (Spring 1997): 15-25.