The Art and Rhetoric of Letter Writing:
Preserving Rhetorical Strategies Throughout Time

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This essay offers an overview of how the art and rhetoric of letter writing has evolved from the classical, medieval, and Renaissance periods, and through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries by examining each period for features that demonstrate its importance. This essay examines how some of the rhetorical techniques and strategies of letter writing from these periods have helped guide writers throughout time. Although some of the purposes of letter writing changed throughout the centuries, rhetorical strategies and techniques found in various manuals, ranging from persuasion to eloquence, are still implemented in writing instruction today.

Letters have served as a substantial communication form throughout literate human history. They offer us a way to communicate with others, whether they are our friends, family, or business associates. *Ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter writing, has been depicted throughout centuries in letter-writing manuals that elaborate on the structure, purpose, and rhetorical features of a letter. Once the basis of letter writing instruction within society and the education system, these manuals remain as historical evidence of the evolution of persuasive techniques now evident in modern writing forms and instruction.

In this essay, I argue that tracing the historical roots of the art of letter writing can help us understand the rhetorical strategies of modern business writing. Rhetorical strategies found in letter-writing manuals from as early as the classical period have been adopted to coincide with business writing techniques in recent manuals. The research presented in this essay is valuable to elucidate comparisons between the rhetorical strategies and instructions found in each letter-writing manual and to explore how we have adapted and acknowledged the rhetorical teachings of ancient rhetoricians.

By tracing the history of letter writing through manuals produced in various historical periods, I demonstrate how the evolution of letter writing has linked classical rhetorical features to modern contemporary rhetorical teachings. Though Aristotle and Cicero were of significant rhetorical influence in the classical period, letter writing gained importance in preservation and format within the medieval period and evolved into a private and educational form during the Renaissance period. In the eighteenth century, it operated primarily as a familial form, whereas in the nineteenth century it was an elemental form in polite society. Finally, it became affiliated with business communication in the twentieth century.

Influence of Classical Rhetorical Strategies

An introduction to rhetoric in the classical period is necessary to understand how and why different rhetorical techniques can be traced through various letter-writing manuals. Within the classical period, theories of rhetoric, such as those of Aristotle and Marcus Tullius Cicero, help us understand the rhetorical principles of letter writing in antiquity. Aristotle elaborates his theory of rhetoric in his book *Rhetoric* (fourth century BC) while discussing modes of persuasion. Although he did not compose letter-writing manuals himself, Aristotle's elements of persuasion were later adapted to address the effectiveness of written discourse in the form of a letter. Pathos, ethos, and

logos can be applied to a written letter because in order to be successful, writers must persuade their audiences by creating an emotional response (whether good or bad), building their credibility as writers, and offering reasoned explanations. These appeals are represented in later letter-writing manuals, including netiquette manuals (manuals on how to write or compose on the Internet), which describe their importance when using e-mail. As Aristotle explained, "It is not enough to know what to say; we must also say it in the right way" (bk. 3). In other words, it is not what writers say that may matter most, but how they establish and organize their letters that will bring the most success. I argue that Aristotle's three means of perfecting persuasion became a baseline formula, which is still preserved in letter-writing manuals today.

Cicero describes different rhetorical techniques for the successful orator. In his work *De Inventione*, Cicero discusses the five divisions of rhetoric: "Invention; Arrangement; Elocution; Memory; Delivery" (ch. VII). Invention is the preparation of what one will talk about. Arrangement is how one arranges these topics. Elocution is how one uses specific words or phrases to describe these topics. Memory is employed when one tries to portray something that will be remembered or uses memory as a means for invention, and Delivery is the art of using one's body and voice to convey the argument (Crowley and Hawhee 265). These five divisions of rhetoric became adapted as the different components of a letter. Cicero also introduced the six parts of a speech: "*exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (background information), *divisio* (outline of parts of the upcoming argument), *confirmatio* (argument or proof), *refutatio* (rebuttal of opposing arguments), and *peroratio* (conclusion)" (Bizzell and Herzberg 429). While all are relevant, this list has changed over time to *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *conclusio*. I suggest that Cicero's parts of a speech became the basis for establishing the purpose of each part of a letter, including contemporary business letters. Cicero also discussed the importance of eloquence or elegant speaking when expressing strong emotions. In discussing a speaker's eloquence in *De Oratore* (trans. Sutton, 1967) Cicero said:

> . . . it does not therefore follow that eloquence belongs to the particular art, the truth being that in the art of speaking, by reason of the vast energy inherent in human intelligence, many a man, whatever his class or his calling, attains some degree of proficiency even without any regular training. (bk. II, sec. 38)

Not only did he evoke strong emotion toward the use of eloquence, but Cicero also believed that any man had the opportunity to become successful at speaking because he had the access to and ability to use eloquence. Eloquence is a trait that is repeated through the examination of letter-writing manuals, including *De Copia* by Erasmus in 1511 and *The Garden of Eloquence* by Henry Peacham in 1577 because it promotes successful speakers, or in this case, writers. Teachers of letter writing made it a point to educate their students with examples on the effects of eloquence in effective, thought-provoking, emotional letters. Today, the use of eloquence is still taught, as seen in *The Art of Letter Writing: A Practical Manual Covering the Whole Field of Correspondence* by Nathaniel Clark Fowler, Jr. (1913), because of its continued importance in business writing. For example, a successful businessperson needs to know how to correctly write important documents, or speak efficiently, in order to demonstrate his or her proficiency.

These rhetorical theories and techniques grew in importance throughout the classical period when oral rhetoric was prominent and continued to gain importance in the early medieval period. Historically, there was no need for literacy outside the Roman Catholic Church because writing and eloquence were not predominately used in public life. However, the art of letter writing soon became an important factor in the Church's effort to document because of its need to preserve history and historical texts. With this increasing need, letter writing soon evolved in the medieval period as a means to compose and maintain historical records (Hildebrandt 8).

The Evolution of Rhetoric and Letter Writing in the Medieval Period

With the powerful influence of the Roman Catholic Church during the medieval period, letter writing became important for preservation. Scribes and notaries were assigned the task of writing down important speakers' speeches to preserve and mass-produce them (Bizzell and Herzberg; Hildebrandt). According to Herbert W. Hildebrandt, "Some letters were dictated orally to a scribe and in turn orally read to the recipient of the letter, linking somewhat further the written with the oral" (9). This was the idea of the early concept of letter writing (becoming a link between oral and written discourse) because even though there were low literacy rates at the time, literacy grew in importance within the Church. Letter writing soon evolved into a more preferred form of a rhetorical genre, leading to the composition of letter-writing manuals like *Dictaminum radii* (or *Flores rhetorici*) and *Breviarium de dictamine* by Alberic of Monte Cassino and *The Principles of Letter Writing* by an anonymous writer for educational instruction. These efforts show the importance and need for more instruction in education, constituting intent to teach and preserve rhetorical techniques.

Although there is no determined theory of who established the idea of letter-writing manuals, a monk, Alberic of Monte Cassino (an abbey located south of Rome, Italy), has been the most commonly accepted originator. In the 1080s, Alberic produced two treatises on the art of letter writing (Bizzell and Herzberg 492). According to James J. Murphy, "Two of his works in the discourse are *Dictaminum radii* (or *Flores rhetorici*), dealing primarily with rhetorical ornament, and *Breviarium de dictamine*, a work which actually takes up the matter of letter-writing" (203). In his first work, *Dictaminum radii*, Alberic represented "the use of rhetoric in writing rather than in speaking" (Murphy 204), which showed his interest in the art of letter writing. In fact, "he frequently employs the term *epistola* [(letter)]" in the first section of his second work, *Breviarium de dictamine* (Murphy 208). Alberic argued that Cicero's parts of a speech could be adapted to writing as well, but he reduced them to four parts (*exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *conclusio*) and focused more on the *exordium* because it dealt with the structural opening of a letter (Bizzell and Herzberg). This intent to teach and instruct how to address a letter is still examined today when addressing a business letter, which shows the timeless influence of letter-writing manuals and the importance of preserving such a technique.

In evaluating the opening of a letter, Alberic reinvented the purpose of the *exordium* by introducing the *salutatio*, or who the letter is to and from or who the letter is addressing and from whom it is sent. Murphy states, "The discussion of the relation between *salutatio* and *exordium* is the longest single treatment of any subject in [his] treatise" (206). Alberic distinguished these two parts as separate, something that can only be possible in letter form. He based his theory on the concept that "[a]lthough salutations usually consisting of the sender's name and the name of the addressee were a fairly common and fixed clement in the classical letter, they had never before been included as an item on discussion in a rhetorical treatise" (Perelman 104). Alberic included the salutation because he believed that it was the most important part of the letter's beginning. In describing Alberic's thoughts on letter writing and rhetoric, Murphy notes that, "For Alberic, letter-writing was still a largely artistic and humanistic undertaking, and it is probably fair to say that he regarded rhetoric as a useful but not dominating factor" (210).

In accordance with Alberic's two treatises on letter writing, other early manuals were constructed during the medieval period and elaborated on his concepts. One manual was "[t]he anonymous *Rationes Dictandi*, or *The Principles of Letter Writing*, produced in Bologna ca. 1135" (Bizzell and Herzberg 493). In this early manual, the five parts of a letter are explained: "the Salutation, the Securing of Goodwill, the Narration, the Petition, and the Conclusion" (Bizzell and Herzberg 497). These parts recall to Cicero's six parts of a speech and are relevant to Alberic's reinterpretation of the *exordium*. In *The Principles of Letter Writing*, a letter is defined as "a suitable

arrangement of words set forth to express the intended meaning of its sender. Or in other words, a letter is a discourse composed of coherent yet distinct parts signifying fully the sentiments of its sender" (Anonymous 7). Although generic, this is the first concrete definition of a letter that could be taught by teachers in schools. In early educational studies, each teacher expressed his or her own opinion about the importance of a letter. However, because of the increased popularity and distribution of manuals, letter writing became more defined as its own genre during this time.

Continuing to support the art of letter writing and to follow previous instruction, manuals of the late medieval period started to adopt the concept of writing letters more frequently. *The Practice and Exercise of Letter Writing* (1300), written by Lawrence of Aquilegia, consisted of several charts for readers to follow as they composed a letter (Perelman 114). In one section, for example, Lawrence recommends that "[I]n composing a letter to a pope, one would select the appropriate salutation, copy the connective phrases and then select an appropriate narration and petition from those offered, copy another connective phrase, and then select an appropriate conclusion from another list" (Perelman 114).

This manual, which reflected the chartistic views of the time, positioned rhetoric and the art of letter writing as formulaic (Murphy 263); someone would only need to follow the charts to compose a complete letter. While such an approach has been criticized as "a rhetorical dead end unparalleled in the history of the arts of discourse...[where] there is no longer any need for invention of materials, for arrangement of parts, or for devising of language" (Murphy 261), it found an audience in Western Europe, both because Lawrence was a well-traveled dictator (in the *dictaminis* sense) who broadcasted his manual and because of conflicting views about the role of medieval letter writing (Murphy 261).

The manuals of Alberic, the anonymous composer of *The Principles of Letter Writing*, and that of Lawrence of Aquilegia were the prominent manuals of the medieval period. Murphy describes how manuals of the Middle Ages formed the basis for letter-writing instruction: "new manuals continued to be written into the sixteenth century, but the basic doctrines continued to repeat what were essentially thirteenth-century Bolognese precepts" (267). Because of this, future manuals advanced *The Principles of Letter Writing* as the determined "correct" manual to use when teaching letter writing. Its adaptation of the parts of a letter are explored in later manuals of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries and is still found in different writing genres today. However, the evolution of letter writing continued from these three medieval manuals to a more stylistic approach in the Renaissance period, which is similar to the rhetorical strategies found in today's modern business letter.

Letter Writing and Style in the Renaissance Period

In the Renaissance period, letter writing became more focused on private correspondence and was concerned more with style than structure. Even though this genre did follow the manuals of the medieval period, there was no more exploration of new concepts or modes of structure, as reflected in the manuals. The manuals of the Renaissance period, like *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) and *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), adapted the concepts of rhetoric presented in earlier manuals but also added more stylistic techniques that writers could use to become more successful.

Style became of primary importance in the Renaissance period, which later influenced its adaptation in different educational settings. Because of this new element, "The revival of classical rhetoric and its 'fusion of thought and expression' came to exercise enormous influence over learning and schooling in the renaissance" (Abbott 146). In order to achieve this, grammar schools were created and incorporated ways for both students and teachers to explore how to integrate style and expression within a letter. With this in mind, "[t]hese schools, were, in a very real sense, an effort to put the educational theories of the Humanists into pedagogical practice. Thus, the main aim of

the schools was also a major goal of Renaissance Humanism: the creation of elegant and eloquent expression" (Abbott 146).

Renaissance humanism included scientists, academics, and political leaders trying to reform a wide range of educational instruction and activities. Not only did these humanists encourage literacy, but they also employed different ways to broaden the outlook of reading and writing at the time and prescribed how citizens could then adapt this knowledge to everyday practices. For example, humanists agreed that the utilization of grammar schools was critical in teaching students to broaden their style and experiment in their own eloquence. In these schools, the definition of "eloquence was to be a special kind: the classical eloquence of Cicero's citizen-orator" (Abbott 170). In adding this element to the teaching of letter writing, educators examined Cicero's concept of eloquence from his work, *De Oratore*, which discusses the importance of such a skill.

Not many new letter-writing principles were introduced in the Renaissance period; rather, these manuals expanded on the early medieval manuals' adaptation of the art of letter writing. However, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, or Erasmus, himself a Renaissance Humanist, wrote *De duplici copia verborum et rerum* (*De Copia*) in 1511, which explores the concept of having and developing abundant knowledge. This theory of copia relates to letter writing in the Renaissance period because students could learn how to acquire an abundance of knowledge for their personal style and eloquence. Donald B. King explains that "as used by Erasmus, copia encompasses within its meaning the meaning of four English words: variation, abundance or richness, eloquence, and the ability to vary and enrich language and thought" (qtd. in Abbott 163). Again, this recalls Cicero's definition of eloquence and his belief, shared with Erasmus, that everyone was capable of creating eloquence and a unique style.

However, Erasmus believed that students must learn and practice on what to do with this abundance of knowledge in order to become successful writers. Erasmus stated, "'[I]f we are not instructed in these techniques, we shall often be found unintelligible, harsh, or even totally unable to express ourselves;'" in other words, copia became the core element of style in the Renaissance period (qtd. in Abbott 163). Although not specifically incorporating this theory into letter writing, Erasmus's practices of copia relate to how writers create their own style when communicating with others. I argue that not only does Erasmus's manual of copia compare to the classical rhetorical theories of Cicero, but also that it relates to Aristotle's discussion of how pathos, ethos, and logos helped in the art of persuasion.

Other manuals were used to extend earlier concepts of rhetoric into more informative manuals that could be adapted to the art of letter writing. *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) by Thomas Wilson and *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577) by Henry Peacham are manuals that inform scholars about rhetoric and the elements of such a genre. Wilson defines "rhetorique" as "an Arte to fet foorth by vtteraunce of words, matter at large, or (as *Cicero* doth say) it is a learned, or rather and artificiall declaration of the mynd, in the handling of any cause, called in contention, that may through reason largely be discussed [sic.]" (Wilson 1). Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* solely focuses on the art of eloquence and explains how particular "figures" are composed of tropes ("when the nature of wordes is chaunged from one signification to an other [sic]"), schemates ("words when they are not chaunged by nature, but only altered by speaking"), and finally, "Rhetorike" (Wilson 170). The manual is designed to introduce and inform readers about figures and the purposes they play within the art of eloquence. Although neither manual directly pertains to letter writing, the techniques discussed relate to the rhetorical features found in a letter.

In continuing through the Renaissance period, letter writing became more prominent with the increased expansion of advanced technology in printing and distribution. According to Edward P. J. Corbett, it was not until after the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century that rhetoric, as a spoken art, was elevated on a large scale to written discourse (31). With this increase in

technology, the teaching of letter writing became more popular and progressive. As Don Paul Abbott describes:

> The technological advances of the Renaissance made the teaching of writing more possible and practical than ever before. The printing press arrived in England in 1477, and paper production began in the first years of the sixteenth century. The use of books, that is, textbooks for students to read and copybooks in which to write, made the act of writing far more central to the educational endeavor. (155)

All of these advancements made learning about the art of letter writing more accessible and accepted. This advancement in printing continued to prosper though the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries when the rhetorical strategies of letter writing were still used and taught.

The Eighteenth Century: Social Mobility and the Letter

Classical rhetorical techniques can be traced throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, but new ideas about letter writing started to evolve by the eighteenth century. These concepts were based on and adapted from the rhetorical strategies stemming from social, cultural, and technological changes. An important manual for influencing the familiar letter was Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions* (1741), which "depict[ed] the familiar letter as a mode of letter writing suitable for all occasions in life and for all people in society" (Dierks 32). Many later manuals imitated the techniques found in Richardson's manual, resulting in growing availability of letter-writing education.

In the eighteenth century, letter-writing instruction became widespread and letter writing took on a more personal form. There was a massive increase in the production of "penmanship manuals, spelling books, grammar books, and dictionaries. Between 1750 and 1800, nearly 400 such imprints were produced in America, a dazzling increase from the 32 comparable imprints produced in the first half of the century" (Dierks 32). This vast expansion in educational materials in eighteenth-century America was influenced by the fact that people wanted to become more socially accepted. There soon was an avid "aspiration for upward mobility in the eighteenth century," and authors of these various manuals tried to raise the idea of "social refinement" (Dierks 33).

Instead of learning the art of letter writing to become a better writer, the ideals of the eighteenth century focused on the importance of staying in touch with family and friends. According to Dierks:

> Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the reading public in England and America began to embrace new cultural ideals of letter writing. These new ideals revolved around what was called the "familiar letter," a mode of letter writing devoted to the expression of affection and duty among kin, family and friends. (31)

This shift represented a new cultural characteristic of letter writing, and it only prospered from here.

This new focus on social refinement was accompanied with a shift in audience. Women became the intended audience of some of the letter-writing manuals of the eighteenth century. As Konstantin Dierks describes, "Once categorically ignored, women were now routinely addressed in the new breed of familiar letter manuals as well as in penmanship manuals, grammar books, and other pedagogical literature" (33). Manuals like *The Ladies Complete Letter-Writer*, published in London in 1763 and later imported by American booksellers, encouraged women to write more and helped engage both genders in the art of letter writing (Dierks 33). These authors did not stop there. In the late eighteenth century, authors of letter-writing manuals also appealed to young children. A prominent manual for children, *Juvenile Correspondence*, published in London in 1783 and then Connecticut in 1791, "contained letters 'suited to children from four to above ten years of age'" (Dierks 34). According to Dierks, these examples included different formations of letters to encour-

age children to write letters more fluently (34). As these instructional shifts indicate, eighteenth-century culture was based on social gain and refinement, and the letter was now seen as the tool to achieve it. Every letter became a symbol of one's social status (Dierks 38).

Because of the desire for social acceptance and the need to address more people, the authors of these letter-writing manuals relied heavily on the concept of audience. This important characteristic of letters at this time recalls Aristotle's perception of audience in the classical period. Not only are the authors of the manuals trying to persuade a type of audience (now men, women, and children), but also the writers themselves are trying to persuade a socially dominant audience who has the power to essentially grant social gain. Recognizing the audience, in essence, becomes the most important attribute of letter writing and letter-writing manuals during the eighteenth century, and continues to be addressed in the nineteenth century.

The Nineteenth Century: The Art of Letter-Writing Instruction for Polite Society

In the nineteenth century, the subject of letter writing became a specific part of instruction in schools. Before that, it had only been given in a university context (Schultz 110). Schools started offering instruction on letter writing as its own form in the nineteenth century. According to Lucille M. Schultz, "In a number of composition textbooks, letter writing appeared as a topic for instruction by the third decade of the century, and by the end of the century, letter-writing instruction was a predictable part of the composition books used in the schools" (110). With this expansion, the manuals began to take on another role in teaching children about letter writing "as a way of staying-in-line and succeeding in polite society" (Schultz 111). This is a shift in the cultural significance of letter writing because it evolved into a way to teach children how to behave within this society.

An early letter-writing manual of the nineteenth century titled *The Universal Letter-Writer; or, New Art of Polite Correspondence* by Rev. Thomas Cooke (1812) expresses how the use of letters helped maintain connections with family and friends and demonstrates what letters provided for society. Cooke writes:

> Had letters been known at the beginning of the world, epistolary writing would have been as old as love and friendship; for, as soon as they began to flourish, the verbal messenger was dropped, the language of the heart was committed to characters that faithfully preserved it, secrecy was maintained, and social intercourse rendered more free and agreeable. (ix)

This quote signifies that the art of letter writing in the early nineteenth century represented more than just a piece of paper that was sent to others; it signified importance and commitment to others and society. Although this concept is evident today in romanticized personal letters or notes to family and friends, it was more prominent during the nineteenth century. The rest of Cooke's manual touches on "English Grammar" as well as "Directions for Writing Letters." In the last section, consisting of about 195 pages, Cooke describes different situations where one may need to write a letter, including examples and strategies to address these situations. Cooke also offers an important reminder: The author must know the audience in order to be persuasive and must know the subject matter to be recognized as professional. His main point is if one studies the art of letter writing extensively, the ease of writing or addressing someone will come in time. While the significance of this advice about mastery has decreased over time because of the increase in digital social encounters, it was quite important in the nineteenth century.

Changes in industry in the nineteenth century prompted the concept of letter writing to evolve even more. Because of a growing industrial culture, "[T]he expansion of commerce and urban life in the mid-nineteenth century meant that increasingly, people were called on to write not only personal letters, but also business and social letters" (Schultz 111). Many of the later manuals of this

century addressed this industrial culture in the instruction of letter writing. In a manual titled, *Hand-book of Punctuation, with Instructions for Capitalization, Letter-writing, and Proofreading*, William Johnson Cocker (1878) offered more technical and in-depth instruction on letter writing, which built upon the five parts of a letter as earlier introduced in *The Principles of Letter Writing*. Not only does this manual go into great detail about formatting the parts of a letter, but it also offers a more precise focus on paragraphs and margins. For example, the manual recommends that "[a] new paragraph should commence whenever a new subject is introduced, and, with the exception of the first paragraph, which begins directly under the comma or the dash of the salutation, each paragraph should commence a little to the right of the marginal line" (Cocker 95). These subtle adaptations to the letter form represent the format of the new business or social letter because writers of the time were advised to pay more attention to format than style or eloquence. As seen today, little details like these count in composing business or professional letters.

Altering the idea of eloquence addressed by Cicero in *De Oratore* and Erasmus in *De Copia*, this new format of letter writing recalls what Aristotle expressed in saying that the establishment of an organization of the letter signifies success, not necessarily what is said in the letter itself. This idea of paying attention to the specific format of a letter will be explored more throughout the twentieth century as the evolution of the business letter continues. Although the business letter was not the only discourse to evolve within the twentieth century, it is however the best representation to show rhetorical preservation.

The Twentieth Century: Business and Technical Aspects of the Letter

The twentieth century continued the new tradition of writing business and social letters rather than focusing on familiar letters because of the increase in business and industry. In *The Art of Letter Writing: A Practical Manual Covering the Whole Field of Correspondence* by Nathaniel Clark Fowler, Jr. (1913), parts of the business letter form are examined to reveal a more specific purpose: "[T]he letter must be prepared with more care, and with more attention to detail, than is necessary for the spoken word" (9). This advice anticipates a more business and industrial-minded audience, one that expects conformity and brevity. I argue that many of the style and formatting requirements found in this manual pertain to what is found in relation to cover letters today. "Business letters," as they are referred to in the manual, should follow a format of the header (date and place), the addressee (name, title, and full address), and a salutation, for example "Dear Sir:" (Fowler 16). This format is consistent with what is taught today on how to address someone in a cover letter. Some moderation has occurred because this manual requires the letter to be indented at different levels, whereas the format today requires writers to justify the text to the left. The manual states, "There is no real objection to this [or justifying to the left], but the usual form of indenting the address line or lines is to be preferred" (Fowler 19). This formulaic approach continued throughout the century. The accepted way of formatting a cover letter today is influenced by the instructions found in these earlier manuals.

There was a new focus on how one should close a letter during the twentieth century. The ending of a cover letter was seen as important to both the sender and the recipient. According to Fowler's manual, "Expressions like 'Sincerely yours,' or 'Affectionately yours,' should be avoided, unless you are intimately acquainted with the party to whom you are writing" (25). This opinion differs from present expectations; most cover letters can be signed, "Sincerely," indicating a sincere request or thank you, not necessarily meaning personal companionship. This manual, indicating the change in letter writing at this time, shows how it is very important to have a positive ending to the cover letter to inspire a return letter. This became the goal of a business letter in the twentieth century, as well as today: impressing the audience enough to receive a response back and to secure good relations with businessmen in an industrious culture.

In the late twentieth century, a new genre based on evolving technology emerged: e-mail. Businesses and individuals alike began using this new phenomenon more to electronically compose letters instead of writing them by hand. However, "[a]s the number of individuals and organizations using e-mail grew, pundits and scholars alike applauded e-mail as a reincarnation of the epistolary tradition" (Walker 230). There are many similarities between an e-mail and a written letter, including purpose and format. In this case, instead of more letter-writing manuals being composed at this time, Netiquette manuals were explored (Walker 230). However, some problems have emerged because "The most interesting and complicated issues with which these [new] manuals must deal is the indistinct relationship between the public and private nature of the letter and the formal and informal tone that different letters may require" (Walker 240). This genre of electronic letter writing poses many issues in style, adherence, and professionalism at times because of the decrease in letter-writing instruction.

The Twenty-First Century: Letter-Writing Instruction Today

Letter-writing instruction today continues the perception of business writing from the twentieth century but becomes more elaborate with the emergence of other writing genres. Although the twenty-first century encompasses ideals found in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, such as social awareness and business etiquette, instruction in this century has broadened the concepts of business writing. The personal, familiar letter has become seemingly extinct because of the increase in technological accessibility. Furthermore, instruction on business letter writing can be found in more than just classrooms; information on this genre can now be found on the Internet. Not only do instructors and teachers educate students on the importance of writing a successful business letter, but there are now counselors and trainers (found both in person and online) who help writers compose successful pieces. With that said, it is important to recognize the history of business writing and how it relates to the rhetoric of letter writing, for as Hildebrandt has argued, "Guided by the precepts of the past, we should recognize that written business communication has an ancient heritage; that it held a significant position as part of an earlier concept, rhetoric, one of the original seven liberal arts of mankind" (24). The concept of writing a successful business letter has never been more important than in this century.

Many professional business writing manuals today, including Charles Marsh, David W. Guth, and Bonnie Poovey Short's *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* (2009), pay particular attention on how to compose successful business letters. This particular manual explores many different business letters, including the good-news letter, the bad-news letter, the sales letter, the request letter, the pitch letter, and the job-request letter. All sections are followed by an example of how each letter should be presented. At the beginning of each section, the authors address purpose (why to write these types of letters) and audience (who is expected to read them). This is helpful for students because they can adapt their writing to a specific type of audience. For example, the first section states, "Understanding the values and self-interests of the recipient of a business letter increases your chances of writing a successful letter" (Marsh, Guth, and Poovey Short 203). In educating students on the different types of business letters by examining their purpose, format, content, and organization, this manual shows how the rhetoric of letter writing has evolved into modern academic studies.

Conclusion

By historicizing the art and science of letter writing, we can better understand the letter's role in reflecting the rhetorical tradition. From the time of Aristotle to today, it is evident how the rhetoric of letter writing has evolved and will continue to evolve in the future. Despite its shifting emphases, features, and audiences, one thing appears evident: the letter and instruction in its ten-

ants will continue to play an important, albeit changing, role in society, education, and business. What is not yet evident from this research but should be investigated further is whether the letter, such as today's business letter, simply reflects changes in rhetorical values and emphases or whether it plays a role in bringing about these shifts.

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