

A GUIDE TO WRITING A LEGACY LETTER

A legacy letter is meant to be personal communication to your family and/or heirs expressing whatever is important to you for when you're no longer here. There's both a practical element (location of important documents, distribution of personal items of sentimental value, etc.) as well as the opportunity to share advice, wisdom, or gratitude with loved ones.

Below is a list of potential topics or sections you might include. These are merely suggestions as you should feel free to personalize your legacy letter to include whatever it is you feel is important.

INTRODUCTION

It is nice to explain up front what the document is and how it's not a substitute for a will nor does it take precedence over beneficiary designations. You might want to express how you hope this document is helpful and enables you to pass on more than simply financial wealth.

ADVISORS

List those professionals you work with such as your wealth advisor, attorney, and CPA. These people will guide your heirs and loved ones through settling your estate and helping to ensure your wishes are carried out the way you intend.

WILL

It is very important to mention where the physical copy of your will is located as most courts require the original (not a copy). It is also helpful to mention who has copies.

OTHER RECORDS

This is where you can list where other important documents can be found such as birth certificate, deed to burial plots, prenuptial agreement (if applicable), life insurance policies, living will, durable power of attorney for health care, passport, car title(s), passwords, etc.

INSURANCE

Detail who the policies are with as well as member/account numbers and where the policy documents are located.

ACCOUNTS

It can be important to document how your financial affairs are managed on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis, especially if you are the spouse primarily responsible for such management. List out checking accounts, credit cards used, investment accounts, how bills get paid (autopay, monthly bill pay, checkbook, etc.) and anything else you think would be important to know so that your loved one(s) know how to continue managing the financial affairs.

FUNERAL

You might consider listing out who you would like to be notified of your passing and providing wishes for the funeral ceremony itself—officiant/minister, pallbearers, music, or any other arrangements that are important to you. If you have such arrangements detailed in a document from a funeral home or church, you could mention where a copy of this document can be found.



PERSONAL EFFECTS

Family disputes or hard feelings can often come from a lack of direction with where you want certain items to go. This is an opportunity to detail those items of sentimental value and list who you would like to receive them. It can also be a good idea to have conversations with your loved ones now to understand who values what so that items end up with who truly values them the most.

CHARITABLE FUND

If there is a charitable fund (foundation, donor advised fund, etc.) that you plan for others to continue giving from after you are no longer able to, you could express that you would like them to consider giving to certain causes or categories of causes that were important to you. You could also express that they determine what's important to them and to give accordingly. This provides clarity for those who will continue the charitable legacy you started so that they can give intentionally and feel good about it.

ADVICE OR WISDOM

Our life is like one big collage of joys, trials, and wisdom gained along the way. Your children and grandchildren (born or yet to be born) could benefit from any advice, wisdom, or stories you have that would help them in their journey of life. You could also express gratitude and love. It might be appropriate to leave general thoughts for your loved ones, or you might feel inspired to write a personal letter to your spouse, each of your children/grandchildren, or others. Think of this as speaking from the heart at a time when your loved ones will likely try to recall the beauty of your life, what it meant for them, and how they may try to live differently because of your positive influence in their life.

FINAL COMMENTS / THOUGHTS

Overall, this whole document is a gift of yourself to those you care about. You may want to end with general thoughts you want to leave behind for your loved ones. After all, a legacy letter is a way for you to leave an “inheritance” beyond financial assets left in your will. This is an opportunity to offer any of the following that you have not already communicated above:

- Love
- Values
- History
- Stories
- Wisdom
- Perspective
- Clarity of intent (around your planning)
- Clarity of feelings
- Hope for those surviving you
- Gratitude

While there are several topics here you could include, you should feel free to make a legacy letter your own whether it means you exclude certain sections, reword the title of a section, or add other sections not mentioned. It's also something you could revisit annually or as often as you deem appropriate based on changes or new perspectives in your life. Putting something like this together and keeping it current is potentially one of the greatest gifts you can give to your family, and quite possibly even to yourself with the peace it might provide. It's never too early to write a Legacy Letter.

