

The Art and Rhetoric of Letter Writing: How Letter Writing Manuals Have
Evolved and Preserved Rhetorical Strategies Throughout Centuries

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Abstract

Rhetorical strategies can be traced back to ancient rhetoricians of the Classical period through the examination of the evolution of letter writing. Letters took the art of oral rhetoric and transferred it to the art of writing in the early Medieval period. Because of the need for documentation, especially in the Church, letter writing became important in order to preserve historical speeches. The art of letter writing soon evolved into the Renaissance period, in which letters became more private and personable. However, although some of the intentions of letter writing changed throughout the centuries, rhetorical techniques have progressed or have been adapted in order to teach basic letter writing today. This paper will research how the art and rhetoric of letter writing has evolved from the Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance periods, through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and how some of the techniques and strategies of letter writing from these periods can still be found in different writing genres today.

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Ars dictaminis, or the “art of letter writing,” has been depicted throughout the centuries in manuals by elaborating on the structure, purpose, and rhetoric of a letter. By tracing these letter writing instructions over time, we can see how letter writing links the rhetorical strategies and techniques from the Classical period to what is being taught in different writing genres today. Corbett and Connors (1999) describe rhetoric as “the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of persons” (p. 1). Rhetoricians throughout time have depicted how rhetorical strategies—persuading an audience, showing pathos, ethos, or logos, being an effective arguer, etc.—are very important. These strategies have helped in the development and teachings of rhetorical discourses in writing genres throughout history.

Some of these rhetorical techniques are found in letter writing manuals and have evolved or adapted throughout time. Although there are many letter writing manuals that have been composed previously, there are some rhetoricians and historians that argue that some are more useful for academic purposes in order to sustain the importance of these rhetorical techniques. Writing letters was not only a way of communicating with different people and groups, but it also was adapted into the education of young rhetoric and composition scholars. These manuals as once the basis of teaching letter writing within society and the education system, now have remained as historical evidence of the evolution of persuasive techniques that can presently be applied to modern letter forms.

I argue that understanding the art of letter writing can help us understand the rhetorical strategies of contemporary academic and business writing genres. Lessons found in letter writing

manuals have been adopted to coincide with business writing techniques, composition courses, and even basic essay writing models of today. There has been a disconnect between the evolution of different rhetorical techniques with the introduction of new education standards as well as the emergence of new technology throughout the centuries. Because of this, it is important to recognize the use of these letter writing manuals and how they helped influence present rhetorical letters. This research is valuable in order to discover the comparisons between the rhetorical strategies found in each manual and to better understand not only the history of rhetoric, but how we have adapted and acknowledged the rhetorical teachings of ancient rhetoricians. In this paper, I will argue that the art of letter writing then becomes a substantial contributor in linking classical rhetorical techniques to modern rhetorical discourses and helps bridge the gap between classical and modern rhetoric.

Influence of Classical Rhetorical Strategies

An introduction to rhetoric in the Classical period is necessary in order 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 Cicero, help us understand the rhetorical principles of letter writing in antiquity. Aristotle elaborates his theory of rhetoric in his book, *Rhetoric* (4th century BC), in discussing modes of persuasion. Although he did not write letter writing manuals himself, Aristotle's elements of persuasion have been later adapted to the effectiveness of written discourse in the form of a letter. Aristotle distinguished and defined three appeals of rhetoric which were pathos, ethos, and logos. Pathos is an appeal to emotion, ethos distinguishes the speaker or writer's credibility, and logos is the use of logic or reasoning. In understanding persuasion, writers would be able to effectively communicate with any audience by using these three appeals. I argue that these three appeals can

be applied to a written letter as well because in order to be successful, writers must persuade their audiences in creating an emotional response (whether good or bad), build their credibility as writers, and appeal to logical explanations. Without doing so, the audience or receiver of a letter may become confused or offended in the misuse of rhetoric by the writer or sender. Aristotle said, “It is not enough to know what to say; we must also say it in the right way” (trans. Honeycutt, 2011, Book 3 review). As Aristotle states, it is not what the writer says that may matter most, but it is how he establishes and organizes his letter that will bring the most success. I argue that Aristotle’s three means of perfecting persuasion became a baseline formula found in these letter writing manuals, which will be discussed later in the paper.

Marcus Tullius Cicero is another rhetorician of the Classical period that compared different rhetorical techniques to what it means to be a successful orator at the time. In his work *De Inventione* (trans. Yonge, 1888), Cicero discussed 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 when one tries to portray something that will be remembered, and Delivery is the art of using one’s body and voice to convey the argument (trans. Yonge, 1888, ch. VII). I argue that these five divisions of rhetoric became adapted as the different characteristics incorporated within a letter. Cicero also introduced his 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 & Herzberg, 2001, p. 493). Throughout time, this list is either limited to four or is altered because of the representation of his divisions. I also argue then that Cicero’s six parts of a speech became

the basis for establishing the purpose of the parts of a letter, as described in the next section. In each manual, the rhetorician signifies the importance of each part and how a writer can become more successful in interpreting and using these instructions in different ways.

Cicero also discussed the importance of eloquence or elegant speaking in using strong emotions. In his work *De Oratore* (trans. Sutton, 1967), Cicero wrote about the elements of a good speaker. In discussing a speaker's eloquence he 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. (trans. Sutton, 1967, Book II, sect. 38)

Not only did he evoke strong emotion toward the use of eloquence, but also Cicero believed that any man had the opportunity to become successful at speaking because by human nature they had the access and ability to use eloquence. Eloquence is a trait that is repeated through the examination of letter writing manuals because not only does it promote successful speakers, but in this case, writers as well. Teachers of letter writing made an effective point to educate their students on the effects and examples of eloquence in order for them to write effective, thought-provoking, emotional letters.

These rhetorical theories and techniques grew in importance throughout the Classical period in which oral rhetoric was prominent, and continued to gain importance in the early Medieval period. Historically, there was no need for literacy outside of the Church because these techniques were not predominately used in public life. However, the art and use of letter writing soon became an important factor of documenting speeches to inform others at this time because

of the 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 history.

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 most important for documentation. This was because of the increased want of preservation and persuasion, due to the increased historical traditions relating to one's devotion to the Catholic religion. Scribes and notaries were assigned with writing down important speakers' speeches in order to preserve and mass-produce them (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001; Hildebrandt, 1988). According to Hildebrandt (1988), "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" (p. 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 of importance in the Church. Letter writing soon evolved into a more preferred form of a rhetorical genre, leading to the composition of letter writing manuals for educational instruction.

Although there is no determined theory to who constituted the idea of letter writing manuals, a monk, Alberic of Monte Cassino (an abbey located south of Rome), and his works have been the most commonly accepted originator. In the 1080s, Alberic produced two treatises on the art of letter writing (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 492). In these works, he focused on the style and format of letters and specified his proposed four parts of a letter, based off of Cicero's theory on the six parts of a speech (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001). In composing this manual, Alberic took these steps and argued that they could be adapted to writing as well, but he reduced them to four (*exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *conclusio*) and focused more on the

exordium because it dealt with the structural opening of a letter. Alberic's concern was focused on how the reader accepted the letter. He "cites the Ciceronian objectives of the *exordium*, that is, to render the audience 'attentive, docile, and well-disposed'" (Murphy, 2001, p. 205).

But, Alberic reinvented the purpose of the *exordium* by introducing the *salutatio*, or who the letter is addressing and from whom it is sent. According to Murphy (2001), "The discussion of the relation between *salutatio* and *exordium* is the longest single treatment of any subject in [his] treatise" (p. 206). Alberic distinguished these two parts as separate, something that can only be possible in letter form. He bases his theory off of 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 element in the classical letter, they had never before been included as an item of discussion in a rhetorical treatise" (Perelman, 1999, p.104). Alberic included the salutation as a part of the letter because he believed that it was the most important part of the letter's beginning.

In accordance to Alberic's two treatises of letter writing, other early manuals elaborated on his concepts and were constructed during the Medieval period. One manual was "[t]he anonymous *Rationes Dictandi*, or *The Principles of Letter Writing*, produced in Bologna ca. 1135" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 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 & Herzberg, 2001, p. 497). These parts relate to Cicero's six parts to a speech and can relate 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, 1971, p. 7). This definition, although it seems generic, is the first real and concrete definition of a letter that could be taught

by teachers in schools that evolved from scribes dictating in the Church. In early educational studies, each teacher expressed their own opinions 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.

The manuals of Alberic and the Anonymous composer of *The Principles of Letter Writing* were the most prominent and effective manuals of the Medieval period. Murphy (2001) describes how these two manuals formed the basis for letter writing instruction throughout the Middle Ages: “new manuals continued to be written into the sixteenth century, but the basic doctrines continued to repeat what were essentially thirteenth-century Bolognese precepts” (Murphy, 2001, p. 267). Because of this, future manuals and rhetoricians considered *The Principles of Letter Writing* as the determined “right” and “correct” manual to use when teaching letter writing. Its adaptation of the parts of a letter are explored in later manuals of the 18th to 20th centuries and can still be found in written letters today. However, the evolution of letter writing continued from these two manuals of the Medieval period to a more stylistic approach in the Renaissance period.

Letter Writing and Style in the Renaissance Period

In the Renaissance period, letter writing became more personable and was concerned more with style than structure. Even though the genre did follow the manuals that were referenced from the Medieval period, there came to be no more exploration in new concepts or modes of structure in the composition of a letter. The Renaissance period adapted to the structure presented in the earlier manuals, but also added more stylistic techniques that writers could use to become even more successful in the art of letter writing. Style became of primary importance in the Renaissance period, which later influenced its adaptation in more 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, 2001, p. 146). In order to achieve this, grammar schools were created for both students and teachers to explore how to incorporate 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, 2001, p. 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 employed different ways to broaden the outlook of reading and writing at the time, and how citizens could then adapt this knowledge to everyday life practices. For example, the humanists agreed that the utilization of grammar schools were 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, 2001, p. 170). In adding this element to the teaching of letter writing, educators examined Cicero’s concept of eloquence from his work, *De Oratore* (trans. 1967), which discusses the importance of such a skill. According to Cicero, to be a good writer, one must be well-versed in the art and exuberance of eloquence.

Not many new letter writing principles were introduced in the Renaissance period; 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 that explored 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. King (1963) 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” (as cited in Abbott, 2001, p. 163). Again, this relates to Cicero’s definition of eloquence, and how he and Erasmus believed that everyone was capable of creating eloquence and their own 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, “if we are not instructed in these techniques, we shall often be found unintelligible, harsh, or even totally unable to express ourselves,” which can be interpreted as *copia* became the core element of style in the Renaissance period (Abbott, 2001, p. 163). Although not specifically incorporating this theory into letter writing, Erasmus’s practices of *copia* relate to how writers created 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 it also relates to Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals of pathos, ethos, and logos and how they can help in the art of persuasion. Pathos is exposed when writers want to use this abundance of knowledge in order to evoke emotion from their readers. Ethos is also important to consider because even though writers have a storage of knowledge, they need to learn how to build their credibility effectively. Needing instruction on how to use this abundance of knowledge is also important to recognize the logic of the letter, in that writers need to learn how to organize a letter and where to put specific information in order for it to convey a logical message.

In continuing through the Renaissance period, letter writing became more prominent with the increased expansion of advanced technology in printing and distribution. According to

Corbett (1971), it was not until after the invention of the printing press in the 15th century that rhetoric, as a spoken art, elevated on a large scale to written discourse (p. 31). With this increase in technology, the teaching of letter writing became more popular and progressive, as Abbott (2001) 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. (p. 155)

All of these advancements made learning about the art of letter writing more accessible and accepted. This advancement in printing continued to prosper through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries where the rhetorical strategies of letter writing were still used and taught.

The 18th Century: Social Mobility and the Letter

Classical rhetorical techniques can still be traced and found throughout the 18th to 20th centuries, but new conceptions and ideas about letter writing start to come into play. These concepts were based on and adapted from the evolving rhetorical strategies stemming from social, cultural, and technological changes. In the 18th century, letter writing evolved from the introduction of new technology to a more personable implementation of writing a letter:

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. (Dierks, 2000, p. 31)

Instead of learning the art of letter writing to become a better writer, the ideals of the 18th century focused on the importance of staying in touch with family and friends. This shift represents a new cultural characteristic of letter writing and it only prospered from here. There came to be 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, 2000, p. 32). This vast expansion in educational materials in 18th-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, 2000, p. 33). However, a new characteristic to learning the art of letter writing was introduced in the 18th century: the inclusion of women.

Women became the intended audience of some of the letter writing manuals of the 18th century. Dierks (2000) describes women’s inclusion as “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” (p. 33). However, these authors did not stop there. In the late 18th century, authors of letter writing manuals also appealed to young children. It was a new subject to children, something many did not understand at all. But the 18th century culture was based on social gain and refinement and these authors did not want to limit anyone from learning this knowledge about letter writing. With this new introduction of the familiar letter, every letter written became a symbol of one’s social status (Dierks, 2000, p. 38).

Because of the want for social acceptance and the need to address more people, the authors of these letter writing manuals, as well as the individual writers themselves, relied heavily on the concept of audience. This important aspect of letters at this time relates to 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 dominating audience that 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 18th century, and continues to be addressed in the 19th century.

The 19th Century: The Art of Letter Writing Instruction for Polite Society

From the exploration in addressing younger audiences in the composition of letter writing manuals in the late 18th century, the focus of this genre remained within schools in the 19th century. Adapting letter writing as its own form began in the 19th century because “while instruction in rhetoric had been part of a university education in the United States from the colonial period, 19th century instruction in personal letter-writing...flourished not in the universities but in the schools” (Schultz, 2000, p. 110). Even though 19th-century culture was not concerned with the use of letter writing to gain social status, it still focused on the importance of familiar letters. Throughout educational development, however, the subject of letter writing became a specific part of instruction in schools. According to Schultz (2000), “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” (p. 110). With this expansion, the manuals began to take on another role in teaching children by teaching letter writing “as a way of staying-in-line and

succeeding in polite society” (Schultz, 2000, p. 111). This is a shift in the cultural significance of the art of letter writing because it is evolving into a way to teach children how to behave within society.

An early letter writing manual of the 19th century titled, *The Universal Letter-Writer; or, New Art of Polite Correspondence* by Rev. Thomas Cooke (1812), expresses how the use of letters have maintained connections with family and friends, as well as what the letters provide for society. Cooke (1812) 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. (p. ix)

This quote signifies that the art of letter writing in the early 19th century represented more than just a piece of paper that was sent to others; it signified a sense of importance and commitment to others and society. The rest of the manual touches on “English Grammar” as well as “Directions for Writing Letters.” In the last section, about 195 pages worth, Cooke describes different situations in which someone may have to write a letter, including examples and ways to address such situations. Cooke also instructs to know and recognize the audience that is being addressed in order to properly persuade them, and to know the subject that is at hand in order to show more confidence and professionalism. Ultimately, his main point is that if one studies the art of letter writing extensively, the ease of writing or addressing someone will come in time. In conclusion, he writes, “...letters are the life of trade, the fuel of love, the pleasure of friendship, the food of the politician, and the entertainment of the curious” (Cooke, 1812, p. x).

But in relation to the culture of the 19th century, the concept of letter writing was also forced to evolve even more. Because of this growing industrial culture, “[T]he expansion of commerce and urban life in the mid-19th century meant that increasingly, people were called on to write not only personal letters, but also business and social letters” (Schultz, 2000, p.111). Many of the later manuals of this century addressed this new cultural addition to the art of letter writing. In a manual titled, *Hand-book of Punctuation, with Instructions for Capitalization, Letter-writing, and Proofreading* by William Johnson Cocker (1878), more technical and in-depth ideals of letter writing are formulated when the five parts of the letter-form are introduced. Not only does this manual go into great detail on instructions and remarks about the formatting of the parts of a letter, but it also has a more precise focus on paragraphs and margins. For example, the manual includes, “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, 1878, p. 95). These little adaptations to the letter form represent the format of the new business or social letter in that writers have to pay more attention to format rather than style or eloquence.

Altering the idea of eloquence addressed by Cicero in *De Oratore* and Erasmus in *Copia*, this new format of letter writing compares to what Aristotle expressed in saying that the establishment and 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 20th century as the evolution of the business letter continues.

The 20th Century: Business and Technical Aspects of the Letter

The 20th century continued this 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 (1913), pieces of the business letter form are examined and reveal a more specific purpose. According to this manual, “the letter must be prepared with more care, and with more attention to detail, than is necessary for the spoken word” (Fowler, 1913, p. 9). This mentality was approached and followed during the 20th century in order to appeal to a more proper and social audience. However, 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, 1913, p. 16). This format is still consistent in what is taught today on how to address someone in a cover letter. Some moderation has occurred in that in this manual, it requires this format to be indented at different levels, whereas the format today requires writers to just put it all to the left hand side. The manual states, “There is no real objection to this [or being aligned on the left], but the usual form of indenting the address line or lines is to be preferred” (Fowler, 1913, p. 19).

The ending of the cover letter is seen as important to both the sender and the recipient during the 20th century. According to Fowler’s (1913) manual, “Expressions like ‘Sincerely yours,’ or ‘Affectionately yours,’ should be avoided, unless you are intimately acquainted with the party to whom you are writing” (p. 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 in order to inspire a return letter. This became the goal of a business letter in the 20th century, as well as today: impressing the audience enough to receive a response back and to secure good relations with businessmen in this industrious culture.

However, in the later 20th and early 21st centuries, a new genre, based on evolving technology emerged: the 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, 2007, p. 230). There are many similarities of an e-mail in relation to a written letter including purpose and format. In this case, instead of more letter writing manuals being composed at this time, “Netiquette manuals” (manuals on how to write or compose on the Internet) were explored (Walker, 2007). However, some problems may emerge 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, 2007, p. 240). This new genre of electronic letter writing proposes many issues in style, adherence, and professionalism at times because of the lack and decrease in letter writing instruction within one’s education.

This new electronic mode for letter writing requires more attention on the subject of audience. As in the Classical period, Aristotle examines the importance of addressing or persuading an audience in establishing the three appeals of pathos, ethos, and logos. These appeals are still relevant in the 20th century because of the vast evolution of letter writing during this period. In focusing more on business letters and e-mail, writers of this newly developed type

of letter need to be aware of the audiences they are addressing and for what reason. Pathos needs to be implemented in both cases because writers should want to evoke emotional or personal responses from what is written. Ethos is then important, especially in business letters, in establishing personal credibility. If done successfully, this can lead to a returned response, which promotes confidence and professionalism. Lastly, logos should be employed to build upon this credibility in order to persuade the audience in proving there is a logical explanation to the letter that is being written.

The 21st Century: Letter Writing Instruction Today

Letter writing instruction today does continue the perception of business writing from the 20th century, but becomes more elaborate with the emergence of other writing genres. Although the 21st century encompasses ideals found in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries like social awareness and business etiquette, instruction in this century has broadened its concepts of business and academic essay writing. The personal, familiar letter has become seemingly extinct today because of the increase in technological accessibility. Today, instruction on business letter writing can be found in more than just classrooms; information on this writing genre can now be found over the Internet. Not only do instructors and teachers educate students on the importance of writing a successful business letter, there are now counselors and trainers (found both in-person and online) that can help writers compose successful pieces, including a cover letter for employment and educational purposes. However, because of this increase access, the business world has become more competitive. But it is important to recognize the history of business writing and how it relates to the rhetoric of letter writing. Hildebrandt (1988) believes, “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” (p. 24). However, 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 (2009) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More*, 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, in which all sections are followed by an example of what each letter should look like. What is also interesting about this manual is that at the beginning of each section, it establishes why to write these different types of letters and what type of audience is expected to read such letters. This is very helpful for students because they can then 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 et al., 2009, p. 203). In educating students on these different types of business letters by examining their purpose, format, content, and organization, this manual shows how the art and rhetoric of letter writing has evolved to modern academic studies.

Composing a cover letter is not the only advancement from the letter writing genre in this century, however. The increased instruction of academic essay writing has broadened the format and purpose of a written letter into a lengthier proposed document about different subjects. However, I argue that the exploration of Classical rhetoricians and the instructions found in different writing manuals throughout the centuries can still be applied and taught in this new genre of composition studies. From the idea of addressing a particular audience as proposed by Aristotle, the main concern about this new academic writing is how to effectively persuade the

audience. There are even types of compositions labeled “persuasive essays” whose main goal is to effectively and successfully persuade the audience into accepting the writer’s position on different topics. Also, Cicero’s six parts of a speech, once altered to become the five parts of a letter in *The Principles of Letter Writing*, has now been adapted to the organization of an academic essay. The format returns back to the concept proposed by Cicero in that academic writing focuses on an introduction, outline of the argument, the proposed argument itself, the proof behind the argument, addressing of the opposing side (including a rebuttal), and the conclusion. All of these characteristics of academic composition studies can be traced back to not only classical rhetoric, but to the evolution of letter writing.

Conclusion

The art and rhetoric of letter writing is important because it explores different strategies and techniques that have shaped the development and teachings of rhetorical discourses and writing genres throughout history. In looking at particular letter writing manuals and their instruction, letter writing is a medium that connects rhetorical strategies through adaptations of different techniques. Letter writing is a genre that evolved and altered throughout time, but I argue that the different rhetorical strategies proposed by Classical rhetoricians like Aristotle and Cicero, can be found in different manuals and writing genres today.

Throughout the centuries, the instruction of letter writing has evolved because of the progression of letter writing manuals and adaptations of classical rhetorical techniques. Appealing to one’s audience, showing credibility or character through particular style choices, evolving one’s eloquence, and articulating particular structure and organization are just some traits that letter writing has successfully developed. I argue that it is important to discover these comparisons between the rhetorical strategies found in each manual in order to better understand

not only the history of this genre, but how we can adapt this knowledge of letter writing into the development of society's expectations and personal rhetorical acquirement. It is also interesting to note that even with social, cultural, and technological changes throughout time, the art and rhetoric of letter writing has helped instruct and educate writers. It is important to use these characteristics from different manuals to educate more students today about the importance of the rhetorical features of letter writing. I conclude that the art of letter writing then becomes a substantial contributor in linking classical rhetorical techniques to modern rhetorical discourses and helps bridge the gap between classical and modern contemporary rhetoric.

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