COMPOSING YOUR CLASS LETTER

The very best letters don’t come from the College but from a volunteer whose voice, sincerity, and good cheer are undeniable. The advantage of a letter versus wireless communication is that people tend to look at a letter when it is a good time to do so. A letter never interrupts the dinner hour and it can be digested at the reader’s own pace. It can be read once, set aside, and read again later. (If you don’t believe that Bryn Mawr women read letters carefully, put in a typo or incorrect fact in one of yours, and see how quickly you hear about it!)

Consider getting together with your Class President and/or other committee members to compose your letter. Think of the impact you will make when a classmate receives a letter signed by the entire class committee.

Here are a few guidelines to help you with your class letter:

The Bryn Mawr Fund office will send you a template for you to work with. The template will highlight this year’s talking points to share with your class. You may edit the letter as you wish.

Make it personal. Remember that the letter is coming from you, not the institution. If you write about faculty, try to refer to a professor who meant a lot to you. Don't just say he/she inspired you; instead tell classmates how a seminar with this scholar led you to your life’s work.

Tell a story. If you tell a story when you write a letter, people find it irresistible. Begin with a story, incorporate a request to give, and finish the tale in the last paragraph.

Top four worst beginnings for a Bryn Mawr Fund letter:

- "Well, it's that time of the year again." Sounds like it's tax time.
- "I know you dread this letter." With that opening they will.
- "Here is another piece of junk mail." We all know where that goes.
- "Dear Remaining Members of our Class." Let me depress you today.

Avoid the passive voice. Remember your freshman English course? Make your sentences active and strong. "Professors teach classes," not "classes are taught by professors."

Suggest a gift at a specific level. Ask amounts are set each year for solicitable alumnae. An ask amount appears on the Class Giving Detail report you receive twice a month. If a classmate says the level is too high, he or she probably will still be flattered that you asked. If you have any questions about ask amounts, contact your Bryn Mawr Fund staff liaison.

Have a P.S. that says something important. People often read it first, especially in a one-page letter. Use it to call attention.
When you have finished, read your letter aloud. If you trip over words or phrases, it probably isn't written well. Get your prose to the point that it flows smoothly and makes sense. Let someone else look over the letter – a friend, another class chair, or a colleague – to get another reaction.

Get someone else to write your letter, but make sure they adhere to the deadline. If you have been writing to your classmates for several years, think about getting someone else to pen the letter. Your classmates may respond to appeals from a variety of class members. It will get you out of the rut.

For more information, call the Resources Office: 610-526-7396 or email us at dmclaugh@brynmawr.edu.