

DEAR DARLA

Student/Class Goal

Health problems are often discussed among students with advice being solicited from others based on past medical experiences and not necessarily an informed diagnosis.

Outcome *(lesson objective)*

Using a letter writing format, students will describe a medical condition and give the best possible solution to the situation.

Time Frame

2-3 hours

Standard *Convey Ideas in Writing*

NRS EFL 2-3

Prewriting	Benchmarks	Drafting	Benchmarks	Editing and Revising	Benchmarks
Topic, purpose, & audience	3.1	Organize writing	1.10, 2.10	Reread & revise	2.18
Writing for purpose	1.2, 2.2	Sentences/paragraphs	2.11, 3.11	Proofread	2.19, 3.19
Writing for various tasks	1.3, 2.3	Descriptive language	2.12, 3.12	Feedback from others	1.20
Generate ideas	2.4	Sentence structure	2.13, 3.13	Checklists & rubrics	2.21, 3.21
Main idea/thesis	2.5, 3.5	Spelling	2.14, 3.14	Publishing	Benchmarks
Research		Punctuation	2.15	Technology	
Plagiarism		Capitalization	3.16	Publication	
Sources		Parts of speech	2.17, 3.17		
Organize ideas	1.8, 2.8				
Organizational pattern	2.9				

Materials

Various examples of advice columns
Dear Darla Letters
 Chart paper or board
Checklist for Writing an Advice Letter Handout

Learner Prior Knowledge

Select any words in the letters that might be unknown for your students and pre-teach selected vocabulary. Students should have had previous practice using the writing standard. To provide students with background knowledge of various medical conditions, a pre-requisite lesson might be *Managing Medical Conditions*.

Instructional Activities

Step 1 - Given the overwhelming amounts of information present in our society, one would assume that finding good advice would be a simple task. This, however, is rarely the case. With so many contradicting opinions, it is important to be proactive and seek beneficial information.

Introduce the lesson by talking about "Dear Abby" and Ann Landers. Ask if the students have ever read these columns before and what they think about them. What do they like or dislike about advice columns? Explain that today they will be taking on the role of advice-giver.

Step 2 - Pass out the handout *Dear Darla* Letters to each of the students. The teacher can read the first letter aloud while students read silently. Lead the group through a discussion of the health issue and what advice they would give this particular individual. Generate advice as a class. Write down all the ideas on a large piece of paper, a dry erase board, or an overhead transparency.

Step 3 - The group will compose a letter of response from their list as the teacher writes on the board. Use this opportunity to model how to write a letter that includes the salutation, body, and closing. Read and discuss the other letters and write response letters for each one. Copy each letter on paper or computer to use later.

Step 4 - After discussing these ideas, have the students write their own letter asking for advice on a personal medical problem. They can choose a real problem or make one up, depending on comfort level. In order to do this successfully, students will have to identify the necessary information in a clear manner. They can use the sample letters as a guide for their own. Pass out the *Checklist for Writing an Advice Letter* handout so they have some guidelines to follow. The main objective for this exercise is to clearly explain the problem and any details that will help the reader understand the problem. Make sure they sign the letters anonymously.

TEACHER NOTE Instead of giving the students an advice letter guideline checklist, give students examples of advice columns to read or listen to and have them design their own guidelines based on the writing standard.

Step 5 - Collect completed letters. Split the class into pairs and pass out two letters to each pair. Have the partners work together to generate ideas and possible solutions for the problems presented in the letters. After brainstorming for a while, have the students write a formal response to the letter. If possible, have them type these responses on a computer. The responses should address the main concern of the letter and list all possible solutions in a clear, organized fashion.

Collect the completed response letters. If possible, make copies of all the response letters and produce a copy for every member of the class. This will allow students the opportunity to see how others solved their particular medical problem while still remaining anonymous.

Assessment/Evidence *(based on outcome)*

Advice Letter

Advice Letter Responses

Teacher Reflection/Lesson Evaluation

Not yet completed.

Next Steps

TEACHER NOTE This format, as a teach-back, can be used to pose scenarios after topics have been studied. For example, after learning about financial literacy, a scenario might be: Dear Darla, I'm tired carrying cash around, but I really don't have a clue how to open a checking account, write a check or get a debit card. Can you help me?

Technology Integration

Purposeful/Transparent

By modeling the letter writing process, the teacher is providing a method for students to use when writing their own advice letters and responses.

Contextual

This activity provides a framework where group discussion can identify and find solutions to individual health issues.

Building Expertise

Students are building their understanding of medical conditions by finding solutions to existing problems and giving advice to benefit others.

Dear Darla



Dear Darla,
I'm extremely frustrated. My wife and I are both 45 years old. She still smokes, but I quit 10 years ago. I tell her at least four times a day how bad smoking is for her, but she just doesn't listen. I suppose it's her right to do what she wants, but I care about her health and don't want her to get lung cancer. Also, I don't like breathing the second-hand smoke either. What should I do?
Concerned in Columbus

Dear Darla,
My neighborhood is getting dangerous. Sometimes I hear gunshots at night. There is no steady work for the young people, and many of them are so frustrated that they start dealing drugs and joining gangs. If my sons live to be 18 it will be a miracle! I can't afford to move, but I'm afraid that if I stay something violent will happen to me or my family. How can I keep my family safe in an unsafe neighborhood?
Laying Low in Los Angeles

Dear Darla,
My father died of a heart attack when he was 42 years old. My uncle died of a heart attack when he was 54. Now my brother is having chest pains and I'm afraid I'm next! All I can think about is dying young. Am I doomed? What can I do to keep my heart as healthy as possible?
Scared to Death in San Diego

Dear Darla,
My fourteen year old daughter has decided she is a vegetarian. She is healthy and she is quite active as a soccer player. I am concerned that she will not get the necessary protein and other important elements in her diet, especially when her body is developing.
Anxious in Atlanta

Dear Darla,
I've been hearing lately that fast food is bad for you, but my family and I eat it and we seem to be feeling fine. We might be just a little overweight, but who isn't? How bad can it really be for you? Is there something else I should know?
Doubtful in Dallas

Dear Darla,
My physician tells me that I may be a borderline diabetic. She says that I may be able to control my disease by diet. How can I do that and what should I do? I am also concerned about my son; he drinks a lot, is tired all the time and can be very irritable.
Worried in Wichita

Dear Darla,
My 2 year old daughter has had chronic ear infections. Her physician wants to put small tubes in her ears. Why is this necessary, and how will it help? Should I allow this to be done?
Hurting in Houston

Checklist for Writing an Advice Letter

1. My letter does not stray from the main topic. Y N
2. I provide details to explain and illustrate my concern. Y N
3. I checked for capitalization and spelling errors. Y N
4. My question is clearly stated. Y N
5. I checked for punctuation errors. Y N