

30-Minute Computer Lab Lessons

Embassy Business Letters

Purpose:

The students will write business letters to foreign embassies requesting information about their country. They will use the Internet to find the embassy address and learn the proper format for writing a business letter. Most embassies do actually send information to the students that can be used to produce a country report.

*Note: This is a two to three part lesson. I usually spent one 30-minute period looking up embassy addresses, one 30-minute period typing letters, and one 30-minute period editing and printing letters.

Curriculum Connection:

Writing

Standard 8

Students write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Objective 6

Write in different forms and genres.

* Produce functional texts

Social Studies

Standard 4

Students will understand current global issues and their rights and responsibilities in the interconnected world.

Educational Technology

Standard 5

Apply productivity/multimedia tools and peripherals to support personal productivity, group collaboration, and learning throughout the curriculum.

Materials:

Computer with Internet access for each student

Word processing program (For example, Pages is located on the dock on all computers in Jordan School District computer labs.)

Country list

Business envelopes

Example letter (to show the students what they should type)

Teacher annotated letter (to help you teach about business letter elements)

Student sample letter (to allow you to see a finished product)

Stamps (I have my students donate stamps if they can.)

Prerequisite Knowledge:

Students should have basic keyboarding skills. Students should select a country from the country list before entering the computer lab. Review with students how to write an address on an envelope before going to the computer lab.

Procedure:

Part One

Have the students open an Internet browser on their computer. (Safari is the browser located on the dock on all computers in Jordan School District computer labs.) Point out to students where the URL (Internet address) is located on their screen (at the top of the webpage). Have the students delete the URL that is currently displayed and type in <http://www.embassy.org> and type “return” on their keyboard.

Once the embassy.org website has loaded, have students move their mouse over the “Embassies” link. They do not need to click on it. A drop-down menu will appear. Then they should click on “Foreign Embassies of Washington D.C.” Remind students that when on the Internet only one click is required to go to links. When this page loads, you will see an alphabetical directory of all the countries that have embassies in Washington D.C. Have the students navigate to the country they have selected (or been assigned) by clicking on the letter that country’s name begins with or by scrolling down the page. Once they have found it, they should click on the name of the country.

The students should now see the formal name and address for the country they are researching. Have the students write the name and address on their envelope. The addresses are written on only one line with commas on the website. Explain to the students how to write the address on three lines instead of one. For example:

Website:

Embassy

Iceland

1156 15th Street, NW, Suite 1200, Washington DC 20005-1704

Envelope:

Embassy of Iceland

1156 15th Street, NW, Suite 1200

Washington DC 20005-1704

Take a moment to explain the NW at the end of the address. It stands for North West and is required for all Washington DC addresses. DC is on a grid system. If the NW is not included, the letter could be sent to the same address on the complete opposite side of the city.

Part Two

Now that the students have their embassy addresses, they need to type business letters requesting information from the embassies. Any word processing program will work, but I will describe the process using Pages (located on the dock of every Jordan School district lab computer).

Open pages by clicking on it on the dock. Click “Choose” to open a new, blank document. I find it helpful to click on “view” then “show layout” from the menus at the top of the page so I can better see how my page will look. Have each student type a letter identical to the example letter. (You may print a copy for each student or project the letter from your computer for the whole class to see.) Be sure to point out the elements of a business letter to the students. (Download the teacher annotated letter from the website for help with this.)

Once students have typed their own copy of the sample letter, have them go back and change the example information to their own information. They will need to change the return address, address, date, country name throughout the body of the letter, and their name. If they have specific requests for information they would like to make, they may also edit the lists of requested information and items in the body of the letter.

Note: Students can use their envelopes to type the address, since they already have it written there. I have every student use the school address as the return address because I like to have them show the other students what they receive from their embassy.

Part Three

When students have finished their letters, have them save their work. (I have my students save to their own folder on the school folder.) I recommend you, an aide, or a volunteer help students edit their letters before printing so they are perfect, emphasizing the need for business letters to be formal. Once letters are edited, have the students save again, then print their letters, then quit the application.

I edit the printed copies of the student letters and have them fix mistakes one more time before they are sent. Teach the students how to tri-fold their letters so they fit into the envelopes. Stuff the letters into the envelopes, seal, and stamp. Be sure to have the students add the return address to their envelopes, then send them off! It usually takes a couple of weeks to receive information, but I have had some embassies take up to five weeks. Warn the students that there is no guarantee they will receive anything, but it is fun to try.

Technology Tips:

When an entire class looks up a website at the same time it can cause the website to load slowly. Patience is required. If your lab is particularly slow, you could stagger when smaller groups of students look up their embassy addresses.

Some foreign embassies are located in New York City, and some countries do not have embassies in the United States. If a student would like to write to a country that does not have an embassy in Washington DC, it is possible to find some addresses on other websites. I suggest doing a Google search including the name of the country and the word “embassy” or “consulate”. I have even gotten some information from the office of tourism for some countries.

I recommend students save their work frequently as they type to avoid losing data if something should go wrong.

I like to teach my students computer “shortcuts” to help them more efficiently edit their letters. If you are using a Macintosh computer, the control button is located next to the space bar. Older Macs have a picture of an apple on the control button, so I refer to the control button as “Apple”. Newer Macs no longer have the picture of the apple. They say “Control” instead. Some helpful Mac editing “shortcuts” are:

Apple c = copy	Apple x = cut	Apple v = paste
Apple s = save	Apple a = select all	Apple z = undo the last action
Apple p = print	Apple q = quit	

Adaptations:

Students who struggle could work with a partner on this project. You could also provide some students with a copy of a business letter already typed and simply have them change the names and addresses.

Extensions:

Have the students visit Culture Grams before or after writing their embassy letters so they can learn more about the country they are writing to.

Have students use the information they receive as part of their research for a country report.