

Letter Closings: A History Lesson in Signing Off

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MENLO PARK, Calif. — What's in a letter closing--the words used to sign off before the signature?

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"Closings that show elaborate respect obviously belong to an earlier era. For example, Don Luis de Velasco, viceroy of Spanish America, wrote Charles I, king of Spain in the 1500s:

"Your Sacred Catholic Caesarean Majesty's faithful servant who kisses your Majesty's imperial feet. . . ."

If there were ever a best seller for closures that survived the centuries, Macauley said, it would have to be: "Your most obedient and most humble servant," as used by Thomas Jefferson to the newly elected President, George Washington. A slight variation, appearing in a letter from the duke of Buckingham to King George I in the early 1600s, said: "Your Majesty's Most Humble Slave and Dog . . . Steenie."