

How to Write a Letter to a Politician

1. Keep it **BRIEF**

- Start with your strongest point. No need for rambling introductions to the issue.
- Shorter letters are more impactful and easier to remember.
- Limit yourself to one topic because adding topics dilutes the effectiveness of your pitch.
- Keep a positive, friendly tone. Confrontational attitudes will only hurt your cause.

2. Use **FORMATTING** to emphasize important points.

- You want your letter to be easily scannable for the main points and takeaways.
- Bullets are fine but don't use too many in a letter. (You can use lots on "How to" lists.)
- **Bold** and underlining are good to use. So is **color** if you can afford it.
- Avoid *italics* as they are harder to read.
- Use ALL CAPS sparingly as it can be interpreted as shouting (in written form).

3. **BE SPECIFIC** in your supporting details.

- Use statistics, facts, quotes, names, etc., to back up your claims.
- Look into the history of the issue and see what has been done before. Was it successful? Use this information to support your idea of how to solve the problem or why some other proposal will not work.

4. Use **EPIC** to help you organize your letter:

- **Engage:** Engage the politician with a strong fact, arresting image, or startling statement of your issue. You are trying to grab the politician's attention
- **Propose:** Make a specific proposal regarding a piece of legislation or action they can take to improve the *status quo* regarding your issue. You want it to be absolutely clear what you are advocating.
- **Illustrate:** Illustrate how the proposal would work and why it's important. Give a few details or examples to make it concrete. This fleshes out your solution and gives reasons why it's a good idea.
- **Call to action:** Call on the politician to take a specific action. This ends your letter with a request which they will remember.

(Adopted from Bread for the World, <http://tinyurl.com/22lhh7>)

5. **FINISH** strong

- **Ask for action.** Be specific and pointed about what it is you want them to do. This is why you are talking to them in the first place.
- Thank them for their time and for listening to you.
- Give them your contact info for future reference.

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6. DRAFT, EDIT, REWRITE

- Improper grammar, incorrect spelling, and poor style can hurt your chances of making an effective argument.
- Always ask one or two people you trust to review your letter for these points.
- Come back an hour later and reread it yourself. Then rewrite it.
- Never submit a first draft. Ever. No exceptions. No kidding.

7. FOLLOW UP with a short, personalized thank you note.

- This is especially important if they respond to you in writing.
- Include your ask in the thank you note.
- This keeps your issue and your ask fresh in their mind.
- It shows them you are a respectful organization worthy of respect in turn

Notes:

- **Don't bother writing to a politician for whom you are not a constituent.** Their staff will likely throw the letter away without reading it as soon as they realize you cannot vote for their boss.
- **Your may receive a form letter in response.** This is normal. Don't be offended by it. IF you want a personalized response, try to get a meeting with the politician.
- **Threats are absolutely out of order.** Not only will they alienate the politician you are trying to convince to support your issue, they may also earn you a visit from law enforcement in the post-9/11 world we live in.
- **BE NICE!** I said this before, but it is worth repeating. You are trying to convince someone who doesn't support you to change sides and risk their reputation and position to further your personal agenda. Confrontation may look good on the 6 o'clock news, but it will not bring you any closer to achieving your goal. (Unless your goal is to get kicked out and then blame "the system" for why your issue failed to pass.)