

Letter Writing Workshop

By Palouse ProActive

Why Write:

Writing letters is a way to raise your voice and share your views with your elected officials or your community. It lets your elected officials know how they can better represent you as a voting constituent or can raise awareness about an issue that impacts your community.

We've been reading that postcards are better than letters because they don't get held up as long for security screening. We've also read articles by former Congressional staffers that suggest calls can be more effective than letters.

Writing An Effective Letter to Your Elected Official:

1. Research
 - a. Pick one issue that is timely (i.e. there will be an upcoming vote).
 - b. Read up on the issue: know the pros and cons of the issue, the proposed action or bill introduced (find the bill name and number).
 - c. Find out where your elected official stands on the issue.
2. Write
 - a. Keep it short (one page or less). Focus on one issue.
 - b. Introduce yourself: include any experience or affiliation relevant to the issue. For instance, "I am a third-grade teacher at a local public elementary school" or "I am a voting constituent from _____."
 - c. Ask for specific action on your issue: "I am writing to urge you to support bill # _____," or "I am writing to urge you to vote NO on _____," or "I am writing to urge you to publicly oppose _____."
 - d. Explain your request: support your request with a clear and concise explanation. A few strong, well-thought-out arguments are more effective than a laundry list of reasons.
 - e. Personalize it: if possible, use your unique knowledge and experience to enrich your argument. Include how the issue will affect you, your family, friends, business, and/or community. Or, help the elected official to understand how the issue will affect his/her district or constituents. For instance, "as a mother of a child with disabilities, I am concerned this bill would _____" or "as a teacher, I am concerned that this bill will negatively impact schools in your district by _____."
 - f. Request a response. Optional: provide your e-mail address as an alternate form of contact.
 - g. Sign off as a voting constituent.

Writing An Effective Letter to the Editor:

1. Research
 - a. Pick one issue that is timely: write letters when they will be most effective.
 - b. Read up on the issue: know the pros and cons of the issue, the proposed action or bill introduced (find the bill name and number).

2. Write
 - a. Keep it short and professional: focus on your one issue, use polite but persuasive language, and keep the letter to 250 words or less (local newspapers require different word counts, please see Submit Section below). Many newspapers will edit letters - keeping your letter short will help ensure that important points are not edited out.
 - b. Grab the reader's attention: start with a compelling introductory sentence.
 - c. State your argument in one clear sentence.
 - d. Support your argument with short, factual points. Avoid broad statements that you can't back up with facts.
 - e. Personalize it: provide examples of how the issue impacts a real person locally and/or your community here in the Palouse. Newspaper readers care about how an issue will impact them, their families, and/or their community.
 - f. End with a call to action: ask readers to take a concrete action, such as calling their elected officials about the issue.
 - g. Sign the letter: include any information highlighting your expertise on or experience with the issue.

3. Submit
 - a. Send it in: follow the submission rules of the newspaper.
 - b. Submit to local newspapers:
 - i. The Moscow-Pullman Daily News here (300 words or less):
https://dnews.com/site/forms/online_services/letter/
 - ii. The Lewiston Tribune here (250 words or less):
https://lmtribune.com/site/forms/online_services/letter/
 - iii. The Spokesman-Review here (200 words or less):
<http://www.spokesman.com/letters/submit/>
 - iv. The Idaho Statesman
<http://www.idahostatesman.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/submit-letter/>

Writing an Effective Calling Script:

1. Research
 - a. Pick one issue that is timely.
 - b. Read up on that issue and/or find a sample script to adapt. Some good sources are:
 - i. <https://5calls.org>
 - ii. www.thesixtyfive.org

2. Write your script

- a. Introduce yourself: “Hello, my name is (first name) _____, and I am a registered voter in (state) _____ in zip code _____. I have a message for Senator/Representative _____.” If you would like a response, you can give your contact information. If you would like your comment to be tallied and shared with the elected official, but don’t want a response, you can say, “I don’t need a response.” Please note that some offices may request your mailing address to count your comment because they want to confirm that you are a constituent.
- b. Ask for a specific action on your issue: briefly and respectfully state what you are calling about in just a few sentences. Include specifics, such the bill number, name of the cabinet nominee, or legislation in question. For instance, “I am calling to urge Senator/Representative _____ not to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Please tell Senator/Representative _____ to support access to quality, affordable healthcare for all of us, including those with pre-existing conditions.”
- c. Personalize it: explain why this issue is important to you or how it would affect your life. Including any expertise or a personal experience you have on the topic can be powerful and persuasive. For instance, “This issue is important to me because it is a matter of life and death for my family. My father is battling cancer and he could be denied coverage if the ACA is repealed.”
- d. Close: at this point, the staffer should say that they will convey your message to the Senator/Representative. If the staffer brings up your representative’s opposing stance on the issue, or gives you reasons why the representative will not take the action you’ve requested, thank the staffer for this information but re-emphasize that you would still like your message to be conveyed to your representative. Remember that representing constituents IS your Senator/Representative’s job. Thank the staffer and end the call.



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