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Chapter 1 : Letters on the improvement of the mind (edition) | Open Library

Letters on the improvement of the mind, addressed to a young lady. By Mrs. Chapone. A new edition.

Learn how elected officials react to constituent communications, and how to create both printed and electronic communications to maximize reading and positive response. What is a letter to an elected official? Why write to elected officials? When should you write letters to elected officials? How do you write to public officials? Should you use e-mail? By now you are probably looking for ways to get your issue noticed by people who have the power to help you. To get the best results, you will probably want to try several of the direct action methods discussed in this chapter. In this section, we will show you the best way to write a letter to your elected officials. A well-written personal letter may be the most effective way to communicate with elected officials. They want to know how their constituents feel about issues, especially when those issues involve decisions made by them. Your elected officials usually know what advocacy groups are saying about an issue, but they may not understand how a particular decision affects you. A well-written letter describing your experiences, observations, and opinions may help persuade an official in your favor. Until a short time ago, you had two options if you wanted to contact an elected official: In the last several years, e-mail has been added and become the medium of choice. Any guidelines for writing letters in this section “the style to use, the information to include” apply to e-mail as well. A political communication, to be taken seriously, should send the message that you care enough about the subject to take some care in writing about it. In the days before e-mail, officials generally considered letters more important than phone calls, because they took more thought and effort. A proper e-mail letter carries the same message “this person has really thought about this, and has put some work into sending his opinion. To explain to an official how a particular issue affects you or your group. To express support for a proposed law, policy, or course of action. To oppose a proposed law, policy, or course of action. To demonstrate to an official that his constituents are aware of an issue and have a real interest in the outcome. To inform an official about an issue or situation, giving background and history that she may not have. To attempt to persuade an official to vote in a certain way on an issue, or to take other related action. To build your reputation as a thoughtful person in the eyes of the officials, and thus make your criticism or support more influential, or to put yourself in the position of the person to be consulted when the official needs information about your issue. To request a meeting to discuss the issue or some related matter of concern. To thank an official for support given, or action taken. To criticize an official for a past vote or action. To put an official on notice that you and your group are watching his actions, and that he needs to take your votes into account at election time. To ask an official to state her position on a particular issue, or to reveal her voting record. To ask for help or support. When would you want to write that letter? Whenever an issue arises that concerns your group, but especially when: You want an official to consider a certain action or policy e. There is an upcoming vote on a policy that concerns your group. Letters are most effective when the vote is about to be taken. This is a good time to use e-mail. You want to respond positively or negatively to a completed action or a change in policy e. You want to point out a deficiency or need in a particular area e. You need information e. You need advice how to approach another official, what kind of event will attract large numbers of officials to take notice, etc. Another way to look at this question is to think about when a letter will have the most effect. There are particular times when letters are more likely to be carefully considered, and when officials are more likely to be responsive. Just before an election. Right before an important vote. Officials will usually be receiving communication from many people on both sides of the issue when an important vote is coming up, so this is an especially crucial time to let your opinion be known. Just before and in the midst of the budget process. One of the most important things that legislators, town councils, and some other bodies do is set the budget for the coming year. If you have priorities for funding, now is the time to make them known. Immediately after an official has done something you approve or disapprove of. There are two reasons why this communication should be immediate. Officials

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need to know who supports or objects to which of their positions. In either of these cases, the official needs to know either that you support her wholeheartedly, and will work to help her, or that you want her to resign now, and will work to have her prosecuted and jailed. How do you write letters to public officials? So how do you write letters to public officials, anyhow? We have a number of guidelines that should help you not only write the letter, but increase the chances that it will be actually read and taken seriously. Decide on the recipient. Get the name, title, and address of the official who will make the decision about your issue. Watch to make sure that all names are spelled correctly and that you have the proper address. An incorrect name counts against you. An incorrect address may mean your letter might not arrive at all. Open the letter in an official manner. In any other letter, use the familiar term "Dear," the title Mr. Senate Office Address Washington, D. Let your reader know immediately what your letter is about. The proposed increase in the gasoline tax will make the cost of transportation unreasonably high for commuters in the metropolitan area. State the general impact that you expect to occur if a particular decision is made. The creation of a peer-counseling program at our high school will help reduce the number of teen pregnancies in our community. Explain your position on this issue. Describe in detail why you feel the decision made will lead to the impact you foresee. This will provide opportunities for our high school students to discuss pressures they experience with their peers at this critical time in their lives. Describe what any changes will mean to you, and to others. Describe specifically the positive or negative effects the decision will have on you personally and on those you represent. The more people affected by the decision, the more convincing you may be. This program will help provide career opportunities for teenagers in our community. Identify others who may be affected by this decision. Tell the official which, and how many, people will be affected. Statistics can be very helpful here. Increased enforcement of the existing laws prohibiting tobacco sales to minors could significantly reduce the rate of smoking among our youth. Mention appropriate actions and decisions the official has made in the past and express thanks for them. We appreciate your past support of the bill protecting the rights of emergency medical crews to not be tested for HIV. Describe what action you hope the official will take. State specifically what action you and those you represent hope the official will take--and by what date, if there is a deadline. If you have written a letter that opposes some action, offer an alternative. I believe that rather than increasing the number of police cars patrolling our neighborhood, a cheaper and more effective alternative would be to work with our community to develop a community-policing program. If you have time and you are committed, ask how you can help Example: Our group is more than willing to explore the various options in helping make our community a safer place to live. Close and sign your letter. Thank the official and sign your full name. Make sure your address, and phone number are included. Check your letter for spelling and grammatical errors. Why not give your letter every possible advantage? At the same time, program staff and administrators, volunteers, and advocates wrote letters to their own representatives explaining why ABE and ESOL were important to their communities and to the state. Legislators responded, and funding for adult education was significantly increased. If you want to engage in a letter-writing campaign, you have to prepare properly. Many people, especially people who see themselves as powerless and unimportant, and who may have little education, are intimidated by the thought of writing to someone in power. In many countries, writing such a letter can carry a certain amount of economic, social, or physical risk. They need help putting their letters together, and they need a model to go by.

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