

Letter Writing

This resource details the importance of writing letters to legislators, administrators, and prisoners. Basic templates and considerations are provided to get you started.

Writing to Legislators

Letter writing directly impacts a legislator's decision making. The more letters a legislator receives, the more important the issue becomes. Letters are a concrete marker of public opinion and consensus: even if you do not receive a response, your opinion is marked and recorded! Personalized letters are more effective than simply signing onto a form letter. Keep your letter to one page or less. It can be handwritten or typed—just make sure it's legible!

Your Information

Your name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Month, Day, Year

Address the letter

The Honorable _____

Iowa State Capitol

Des Moines, IA 50319

Re: House/Senate File # _____

Dear Representative/Senator/Assembly Member _____,

Introduce yourself in one sentence

"I am a college student at _____ and a registered voter in your district."

Get to the point. Stick to one issue per letter.

Use simple language in a polite and informative tone. State the bill you are concerned about by file number and name if it has one, and briefly summarize it. State your position on the issue and the request you are making of your representative. Use positives like "I encourage you to..." and "I hope you will...".

Bring it home. State how this bill will impact you or someone you know. Use a personal anecdote!

In a few sentences, describe your personal stake in the issue. Use facts and data when appropriate. Short personal anecdotes sprinkled with a few specific details stick with legislators the most.

Ask for a response and offer yourself as a resource for follow-up questions.

"Please let me know your position on House/Senate File# _____. I am happy to answer any questions you may have or provide more details about how this bill would affect my community."

Conclude the letter.

In a couple of sentences, recap your main points and encourage specific action. Be clear, specific, and polite.

Sincerely,

(sign here by hand)

Print Your Name



Questions about this resource?
Email campus@iowsafeschools.org



Writing to Administrators

Writing letters to your college's administrators instead of sending emails makes a big impression. The time and effort taken to write a thoughtful and respectful letter will amplify your concerns and help convince your administrator to offer their own time to you. As in writing to legislators, your letter does not have to be typed as long as it's easily legible. If several people in your organization are writing letters, make sure they don't all look or sound too similar. Personalization make each letter more effective.

Your Information

Your name

Class year

Major (Intended or Declared)

Month, Day, Year

Address the letter

Dear President/Mr./Ms./Mx. _____,

Briefly introduce yourself.

"I am a third year Gender and Women's Studies major, an executive member of the LGBTQ student organization SPECTRUM, and a varsity volleyball player."

State your concern and related request.

Use polite and informative language. Even if you're angry and fired up about the issue, you will be heard better in a letter when you avoid combative or accusatory tones. Clearly state what specific action you would like the administrator to take. Get specific and include a timeline when appropriate. Stick to one or two issues that you'd like to be addressed, otherwise the letter becomes a long to-do list and your message gets diluted.

Use a personal anecdote.

Tell a quick story about how the issue has personally affected you or someone close to you. You should only tell stories that you have personally witnessed or experienced to ensure its credibility. If you are telling a story about someone else, ask for their consent before including their story in the letter.

Ask for a follow-up.

"Please let me know how you will address this important issue. I would greatly appreciate setting up a meeting to discuss the issue in more detail."

Conclude.

Briefly summarize your main points and thank the administrator for their work and consideration.

Sincerely,

(sign here by hand)

Print your name



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