

LETTER WRITING

Purpose:

- To develop letter writing skills
- To write a letter stating one's position on an issue

Materials/ Resources:

- Municipal, Provincial and House of Commons web sites for local councilor, MPP and MP addresses
- Paper, envelopes, stamps

Instructions:

1. Read through the "letter writing tips" below
2. Identify the most appropriate person/people to write your letter to
3. Make sure you have done your research
4. Write the letter, using proper business letter format
5. Have it reviewed and proofread by peers and your teacher
6. Stamp, address and mail it

Letter Writing Tips:

A good letter requires background research to identify to whom you need to write, and to be able to present an informed opinion. Be sure to use appropriate business letter format and consider including 3 paragraphs:

Paragraph 1: The introductory paragraph identifies you, your relationship to the recipient (e.g. concerned student, child of taxpayers in the riding etc.) and identifies the purpose of the letter.

Paragraph 2: The body paragraph clearly states your position on the issue and explains your rationale for taking that position. This is where you include some of your supporting evidence and explain how it backs up your position as well as explaining how the issue affects you.

Paragraph 3: The concluding paragraph identifies what you are requesting and asks for a reply.

Consider the following advice for writing a letter to your MP, adapted from the Canadian Psychological association's website: http://www.cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm

Be direct. State the subject of your letter clearly, keep it brief and address only one issue in each letter.

Be accurate. Beware of false or misleading information. Always double-check if you are not sure.

Be informative. State your own views, support them with your expert knowledge, and cite the bill number (Bill G####) of relevant legislation, if appropriate. Your

personally written letter is more highly regarded than pre-printed materials or postcards.

Be courteous. Never threaten your MP. Keep in mind that there may be other issues where your organization will lobby this MP. A cordial relationship keeps the door open.

Be constructive. Rely on the facts and avoid emotional arguments, threats of political influence, or demands.

Personalize your message. Cite examples from your own experience to support your position. Give personal examples of how the issue will impact your community.

Be political. Explain the hometown or school relevance of this issue. Use your institution's stationery, if authorized.

Be discriminating. Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness.

Be inquiring. Ask for the MP's view on the subject and how she or he intends to vote on relevant legislation. Expect a reply, even if it's only a form letter.

Be available. Offer additional information if needed and make sure your MP knows how to reach you.

Be appreciative. Remember to say "thanks" when it is deserved. Follow the issue after you write and send a letter of thanks if your MP votes your way.

REMEMBER, no postage is required to mail a letter to your MP in Canada. Furthermore, since a fax gets more attention, faster, send it also by fax.

Follow-up to Your Letter

MPs' offices receive hundreds of pieces of mail every day, which means it can take a week or more to research the issue properly and to answer your letter. If you don't hear from them after three or four weeks, however, follow up with a phone call, or with another letter that references the first one.

- * If the reply you receive asks specific questions about the issue, make sure you respond with the answers.
- * If your representative votes or takes a public stand that reflects your position, send a thank-you. It's just as important to let your representatives know you support a position as it is to let them know you oppose one.
- * If you are lobbying as part of a larger movement, make sure you send copies of all your correspondence with elected officials to the (local organizing committee). This allows groups to track grassroots communications and determine where they might need to get more people involved.