

Write a Letter to Your Representative

An Ability to Make a Difference & Community Activity

Estimated time to complete: 1-2 class periods

Essential Questions

- How can I help solve problems in my community?
- How can persuasive letter writing help influence local decisions that impact me and my community?
- What are the characteristics of persuasive letter writing?

Materials

Computer or paper, pen, envelope, and stamp

Background

One way to make our voices heard in a democracy is to write a letter to our elected representatives and leaders in local, state, and federal government. Letters are a great way to share our concerns and experiences related to sustainability and environmental justice issues in our communities, and to help spur action toward solutions.

Activity

Before getting started on letter writing, first answer the first two questions below.

Who should you write to?

Depending on your community issue of concern, you may want to address your letters to local, state, and/or federal representatives. Who has the power to make decisions impacting your issue of concern? You can find your representatives at: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.

Once you find your representatives' websites, you can do a little research to find out what issues they care about to help tailor your message to their priorities. For example, if you're concerned about idling school buses in front of your school, and you have a school board member that cares about improving student health, you can make a compelling argument linking investment in electric school buses to improved student health.

GRADE LEVEL



5-12

CONNECTIONS TO THE BIG IDEAS OF SUSTAINABILITY



SYSTEMS



PLACE



ABILITY TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE



COMMUNITY

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS



ELA:
LETTER WRITING,
PERSUASIVE
WRITING



SOCIAL STUDIES:
BRANCHES OF
GOVERNMENT, HOW
BILLS BECOME LAWS

Email or snail mail?

Many elected representatives can be reached via email through their websites. If you choose to email your representative(s), craft a direct, concise subject line. Examples include “Support H.R. 5678” and “Our students deserve clean air, invest in Electric School Buses”).

If you’re sending a formal letter by mail, start with an address, the date, and a salutation. Letters will be addressed differently depending on who you are writing. The examples below are for your congressional representative and your senator. You can also write letters to local city council members, school board members, your mayor, state representatives, your governor, and directors of departments or agencies.

For your representative

The Honorable (full name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20510

For your senator

The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20515

Next, include the full date (example: January 1, 2022) and with a break in between, the salutation (Dear Representative/Senator Smith). Follow that with a colon.

Put together, the start of a letter to a representative should look something like this:

The Honorable John Smith
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20510

January 1, 2022

Dear Representative Smith:

Writing Your Letter

Whether you’re emailing or writing a formal letter, an effective letter will:

- **Introduce you** as a constituent of the legislator.
- **Inform them of the issue** you’re writing about, preferably in the opening paragraph.
- **Explain how the issue impacts you personally**, citing relevant data/evidence if you can.
- **Specify the action** you hope your legislator takes on the issue you’re writing about. If there is a specific bill number you can reference, and a position you want them to take on it, make sure to include those details.
- **Inquire about their position** and the course of action they plan to take.
- **Show appreciation** by thanking them for any action they’ve taken in the past that you appreciate, if possible, and by thanking them again in closing.
- **Be respectful and courteous**, by using a hopeful, constructive tone, and avoiding personal attacks.
- **Be concise**, keeping your letter to no more than a page, or about 500 words.
- **Include your contact information** so that they can get back to you with their response.



Letter Template

The Honorable _____ (full name)
United States House of Representatives / United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

_____ (date)

Dear Representative/Senator _____ (last name):

My name is _____ (your full name) and I am your constituent from _____ (your hometown). I am writing because I (support/oppose/am concerned about) _____ (why you're writing).

I (support/oppose/am concerned about) _____ (why you're writing) because _____ (why it matters to you). In fact, _____ (relevant facts and data).

Because of this, I hope that you _____ (what you want — funding for a project? For them to vote a certain way? Include specifics.) How do you plan to _____ (vote/decide/etc.)? I appreciated your support in _____ (past action — supporting a bill/voting one down/funding something/etc).

Thank you for your _____ (support/generosity/etc).

Sincerely,

_____ (your name)

Reflection Questions

- What kind of explanations or examples did you include in your letter that you feel would be most persuasive to the person you're writing to?
- Now that you'd written your letter, how might you encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to write one too!? You can share yours as an example to get them started!
- Who else might you want to write a letter to? About what issue?