

LETTER WRITING TIPS

1. **READ INSTRUCTIONS PROVIDED.** Most publications provide guidelines for writing a letter to the editor.
2. **INCLUDE YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, EMAIL ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER AT THE TOP OF YOUR LETTER.** Editors often require this information because they will need to verify your identity.
3. **IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR NAME TO BE PUBLISHED,** state so clearly. You can put any direction or request like this in a separate paragraph. For example, you can simply put "Please note: I do not want my full name to be published with this letter." If you are a minor, inform the editor of this as well.
4. **IF YOU ARE RESPONDING TO AN ARTICLE OR LETTER,** say so right away. Name the article in the first sentence of the body of your letter.
5. **BE CONCISE AND FOCUSED.** Write your letter in pithy, clever statements, but remember that this is easy to do! Short, concise letters sound confident. Long, wordy letters give the impression that you're trying too hard to make a point. You will probably need to write several drafts of your letter to condense your message.
6. **AVOID CLICHÉS AND WEAK PUNS.** Also, don't appear to be overly emotional. You can avoid this by limiting your exclamation points. Also avoid insulting language.
7. **LIMIT YOUR LETTER TO TWO OR THREE PARAGRAPHS.** Try sticking to the following format:
 - In your first paragraph, introduce your problem and sum up your objection;
 - In the second paragraph, include a few sentences to support your view; and
 - End with a great summary and a clever, punchy line.
8. **PROOF READ YOUR LETTER.** Editors will ignore letters that contain bad grammar and poorly-written rants. Submit your letter by email if the publication allows it. This format enables the editor to cut and paste your letter.
9. **DON'T SEND COPIES OF YOUR LETTER TO A WHOLE HOST OF PUBLICATIONS.** Make it an original to the publication you really want to publish it. If you don't get a confirmation call within a week to 10 days, then try submitting it elsewhere.
10. **DON'T BE GREEDY.** If your letter is published, wait at least a month before submitting another one. Letters editors want to give as many people as possible a chance to comment on the issues.

HOW TO ADDRESS A POLITICIAN

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES

POSITION Prime Minister
ENVELOPE The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, MP
Prime Minister
SALUTATION Dear Prime Minister

POSITION Minister
ENVELOPE The Honourable John Smith, MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Trade
SALUTATION Dear Minister

POSITION Member of Parliament (MP)
ENVELOPE Mr. /Mrs. (or the [Right] Honourable John/Jane Smith, MP
SALUTATION Dear Mr. /Mrs. Smith

PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVES

POSITION Premier
ENVELOPE The Honourable Brian Pallister
Premier of Manitoba
SALUTATION Dear Premier

POSITION Minister
ENVELOPE The Honourable Kelvin Goertzen, MLA
Minister of Health
SALUTATION Dear Minister

POSITION Member of the Legislative Assembly
ENVELOPE Mr. Mrs. John/Jane Smith, MLA
SALUTATION Dear Mr. / Mrs. Smith

MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATIVES

POSITION Mayor
ENVELOPE His Worship Brian Bowman, Mayor of Winnipeg
SALUTATION Dear Sir

POSITION City Councillor
ENVELOPE Councillor John Smith, St. Vital Ward
SALUTATION Dear Councillor Smith

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO A POLITICIAN

LAYOUT

CONTACT DETAILS:

- Include your name and contact details in the top left-hand corner of the page
- Include their name and contact details underneath on the left-hand side of the page.

FORM OF ADDRESS:

- Dear Prime Minister
- Dear Premier
- Dear Minister
- Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms/Dr. (surname)

INTRODUCTION:

- State what the issue is
- State what you want done about it

BODY:

- Focus on two or three main points which support your view. Use examples from your research as evidence.

CONCLUSION:

- Reiterate your view expressed in the introduction
- Pick one strong example from your letter to back up your point
- Ask for the politician to respond to your letter
- Conclude with a salutation, e.g. regards, yours sincerely

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR DRAFTED LETTER

1. Adhere to the five-paragraph essay structure of a clear introduction, at least three paragraphs, each addressing an argument supporting your main point, and a conclusion.
2. Be respectful. They are more likely to listen to your point if it is not accompanied by abuse.
3. Tell them something about yourself. A simple phrase such as “I have spent the last 20 years working at the Health Sciences Centre” creates a mental image which brings you and your point alive.
4. Be concise. Write on only one issue at a time, and clearly state your point early in the letter. Try to keep the letter to one page.
5. Make sure you are writing to the correct person. Consider whether the issue is a federal or provincial one. Consider which cabinet minister is responsible for the issue.
6. Request that a particular action be taken.
7. Aim for the public interest. Explain why you think your request will benefit the public as a whole, not simply you and your friends.
8. Get the facts right. You do not have to have all of the facts (much less recite them all), but the ones you put in your letter must be correct. Do not let the fact that you are not an expert prevent you from voicing your opinion.
9. Express yourself naturally. Remember that this is your expressing what is on your mind. You do not have to sound like Lincoln or Churchill.
10. Ask for a reply. The best closing sentence is “I look forward to receiving your response”.
11. Consider if you should send a copy of the letter to anyone else. Your local representative should always receive a copy of a letter you send to the Prime Minister, Premier or any cabinet minister. We at CPAWS are also always happy to receive copies of the letters you send to elected officials.

CHECK LIST

Format of the Letter

- The letter includes the Sender's information, address, and date
- The letter includes the Recipient's name, position, and address
- The opening salutation is clearly written
- There are at least three paragraphs to the letter (at least one for each section)
- The letter includes a complimentary closing (Thank you and request for action)
- The letter includes the writer's name and "A Concerned Citizen"

Content of the Letter

- The letter is addressed to an authority from the correct level of government
- Section 1 - Identifies the writer's concern and reasons for the chosen audience
- Section 2 - Explains the issue and outlines at least two viewpoints
- Section 3 - Outlines and explains the preferred solution(s) and requests appropriate action
- The supporting evidence is relevant to the concern being expressed
- The evidence given is sufficient to support the opinion
- Words and phrases used are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and style
- The letter meets the purpose of persuading the intended audience to acknowledge the concern and consider the proposed solution(s).

Language Conventions (pencil in corrections on the draft where necessary)

- Words are spelled correctly
- The vocabulary is appropriate and relevant to the topic
- Grammar used is correct and effective
- Punctuation is correct and effective