

## How to Write an Effective Letter

Letters from constituents are extremely important to decision-makers, since most of them do want to know what the people they represent think about issues. The zip code of the writer is often the critical element in ensuring that the letter is read by the official or responsible aide because of the importance of keeping informed about their constituents' opinions. A large number of letters from constituents in support of, or in opposition to, an issue has significant impact. When educational issues are being considered, letters from parents may often be more persuasive to legislators and other decision-makers than are those from educators.

### Make Your Letter Count!

#### Essential components of a letter to your elected official

Officials and their staff pay careful attention to their mail since it often conveys the major body of public and voter sentiment on pending legislative activity. Here's an outline to follow when writing a letter to your elected official.

**1.** Introductory paragraph

Give a reason for your letter, stating the title and number of existing or pending legislation, if appropriate.

Identify yourself and your interest in gifted education.

State the action you are seeking.  
Identify yourself as a constituent, if applicable.

**2.** Communicate reasons why this legislator should act in support of your bill. These reasons might include historical facts, logic, data, credible opinion, personal experience, and/or the weaknesses of opposing points of view. Your facts must be accurate.

**3.** Letter closing

Restate the action you are seeking.

Ask for the official's commitment.

Express appreciation for considering your views.

Indicate willingness to help.

If you can arrange it, invite the official to visit your classroom or school.

#### Tips to Increase the Effectiveness of Your Letter

- 1.** Be courteous, constructive, and reasonable, or you will lose credibility and the reader's good will.
- 2.** Your facts must be accurate. Be careful not to give exaggerated or misleading information that might embarrass your decision-maker in front of his or her colleagues. If you know the source of your information, cite it.
- 3.** When appropriate, send copies of your letter to key consultants and legislative staff.
- 4.** Write your letter in your own words. Form letters or mimeographed cards do not produce interest or results.
- 5.** Use your own stationery and stamps. Unless you are an authorized spokesperson for your place of employment, never use your work time or materials for advocacy purposes.
- 6.** If you are representing a group, state your office or area of responsibility and use the organization's stationery.
- 7.** Be neat. Type if your handwriting is hard to read. Grammar and punctuation are not as important as your ideas, but do spell names correctly.
- 8.** Include a copy of a reliable article supporting your point of view whenever possible.
- 9.** Send a letter of appreciation after you have received the support you requested.