

Letter-writing Guidelines

When you write a letter, you want to make sure that you follow specific guidelines and formatting requirements. By doing so, you accomplish two things: first, your letter will have all of the necessary content, which makes it easier for your to get your point across; second, you letter will look nicer and be taken more seriously by the reader.

When you write to your congressman or woman, you want to use a business letter template, which looks like this:

Your name		
Street Address	←	<i>This is the sender's address. Put your address here.</i>
City, State Zip		
February 4, 20XX	←	<i>This is the date that you wrote the letter.</i>
Senator Basil Leef	←	<i>This is the receiver's address. Put your representative's address here.</i>
123 Dirksen Senate Office Building		
Washington DC 20510		
Dear Senator Leef:	←	<i>Open with a polite salutation.</i>
<p>Body of the letter -- this consists of roughly 3-5 paragraphs. These paragraphs introduce the issue and what you are asking the senator to do, discuss your concerns, and explain why the issue is particularly important to you. Its concluding paragraph thanks the Senator for his/her attention and restates the request.</p>		
Sincerely,	←	<i>This is where you close the letter. After you write "Sincerely," skip about four spaces then clearly print your name. In the space you just left, sign your name in cursive.</i>
<i>Your signature</i>		
Your name printed		

The body of your letter should contain the following:

- An introduction, introduce yourself and explain why you are writing this letter. Tell your senator exactly what you want him or her to do, such as vote for a bill, vote against a bill, support or deny a judicial appointment, etc.
- An explanation, explain why this a concern to you. Why are you asking your senator to do this?
- Some support, explain why it is important for him or her to do this.
- Some personal details, which will explain why you are concerned about this topic.
- A conclusion where you thank your senator and restate your request.

This might seem like a lot, but don't worry -- each paragraph is only a few sentences. You want to get right to the point with your letter. Be specific with your request and then explain why it is important. Do not let your emotions get in the way!

Use the template to plan your letter. When you are ready, write your final copy on a clear sheet of paper in your best and your neatest handwriting. If you are able to type your letter, do so; but if not, don't worry. Senators still read handwritten letters!