

Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor (LTE)

- **Keep it short (150 -- 250 words).** If you do not edit your LTE, the news outlet might edit it for you. Since they could cut out your main point, it is best to write something both punchy and brief.
- **Speak in your own voice.** Explain why the article matters to you. Talk about your faith, professional experience, or knowledge of human trafficking. Be personal and authentic.
- **Get local.** Editors are generally more interested in letters that highlight local impacts. Can you relate the issues raised in a national piece on human trafficking to issues impacting your own community?
- **Follow these best practices:**
 - 1) Reference a recent article (if possible). Your letter is most likely to be published if it responds directly to the newspaper's recent coverage of a specific trafficking issue. Mention the article you are responding to by its headline and date of publication.
 - 2) Send your LTE in the body of your email, not as an attachment.
 - 3) Include contact information. Include your full name, contact information, location, and profession or expertise (if relevant) in the email as well. (The paper will not print your contact information.)
- **Be timely.** Try to get your LTE submitted within 1 - 3 days after the relevant article is published.

Tips on Ways to Communicate with State and/or Federal Legislators:

“Why should my Congress person care what I think?” you may ask. Well, you are one of their constituents. It is their job to represent you in government. They work for you, and if they do not do their job by satisfying the people they represent, they can get voted out of office in the next election.

People who think members of the U.S. Congress pay little or no attention to constituent mail are just plain wrong. Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways Americans have of influencing the lawmakers they elect.

Members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day, so you will want your letter to stand out. Whether you choose to use the U.S. Postal Service, fax, or email, what follows are tips that will help you write a letter to Congress that has an impact.

Know that your vote counts. Moreover, because representatives receive relatively few personal letters, your letter may hold more sway than you think. So write with confidence!

E-MAIL/PHONES:

E-mails are the easiest way to go, so they flood Congressional inboxes 24/7. Your e-mail could easily be overlooked or quickly forgotten. Once your e-mail is bumped off the top of the first page, it's quickly “out of sight, out of mind.” The staffer or Congress person may never even get past the subject line. While email is convenient and quick, it may not have the same influence as the other, more traditional, routes, such as a personal visit, a phone call, or a personal letter.

If you do decide to e-mail, keep in mind that the best time to send an e-mail is Thursday between 8 and 9 a.m. The worst time to send an e-mail is Tuesday and Wednesday from 8 to 10 a.m.

Phone calls are another popular option, but there is no real record of your statement for your Congress person to see. Phone calls are answered by assistants, often temporary college interns, who will not be able to write down every thought or argument you make. Instead, they are usually advised to simply keep a tally of the “For” and “Against” phone calls.

Writing to:

The President:

The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500
Dear Mr. President:

A Senator:

https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

The Honorable (full name)
(room #) (name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
Dear Senator (last name):

A Representative:

<https://www.house.gov/representatives>

(Use a zip code, but you may need to refine it based on your physical address because zip codes and Congressional districts do not coincide.)

The Honorable (full name)
(room #) (name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Dear Representative (last name):

A **constituent** is anybody who lives in the district of a Congress person. For Senators, a constituent is anybody in their state. Elected officials listen most intently to voters in their own districts, and hardly listen at all to voices from outside of their districts. In most cases, it is not worth the trouble to write to officials who do not represent your state and district. The majority of Congressional offices automatically forward non-constituent letters to the Congressional office representing the letter-writer.

There is something about committing a message to paper that makes it all the more official and concrete. Generally, this is your best route if you have the time to do it right, and you want to be taken seriously. (If you have access to a fax machine, that is also a very good means to communicate. See below.) Good stationery is also important. Write legibly or use a computer. Use a normal-sized font (Times New Roman or Arial are best) and color to make it easy to read.

Do Not Use Boilerplate Text.

Many grassroots organizations will send out a prepared text to people interested in their issue. When receiving form letters, the Representative's staff will say, "We got 25 letters or emails supporting XYZ." Getting thousands of letters that say the exact same thing will only diminish the impact.

The intent of form letters is to make it easier to contact your representatives, but obvious form letters eventually get tossed aside. Why get thrown in the bin when you can take a few minutes to write your own and make sure someone takes the time to read your thoughts? If you send a form letter, try at least to add a personal notation.

If you really want to make an impact, it is always best to write your own letter. You can copy ideas or statistics from the form letter, but try to paraphrase and make your letter more personal. Write the letter in your own words with your personal perspective.

Are You a Constituent?

If you are a constituent, mention this very early on in the letter. You should also include your full name, address, and email after the space where you sign your name at the bottom of the letter.

Limit your letter to one page and address a single topic.

In general, letters should be three short paragraphs.

1. Say why you are writing and who you are. List your "credentials" and state that you are a constituent. (It also does not hurt to mention if you voted for or donated to them.) The first paragraph should state that you support or oppose a position or piece of legislation.
2. The second paragraph should explain, briefly, the reasons for your support or opposition. Use specific examples or evidence to support your position, along with a few pertinent facts or statistics that drive your point home. Make sure you avoid biased sources, and always list your resources. Use specifics about how the topic affects you and others personally. If a certain bill is involved, cite the correct title and number whenever possible to demonstrate that you know what you are talking about. When appropriate, document your position with an accompanying article or editorial.
Bill titles and numbers can be found at: <https://www.Congress.gov/>
3. The third paragraph should request the action you want to be taken. It might be a vote for or against a bill, a change in general policy, or some other action, but be specific. Thank them for their time.

Sign your name, title, address, and phone number.

Proofread Your Letter.

Before you sign and seal your letter, make sure to proofread it first. Ensure that you have not left out any important, pertinent information. Take the time to proofread for mistakes and run spell check. It helps to read out loud to catch awkward sounding phrases or bad grammar. You may even have a friend read it over to make sure your letter makes sense and to double-check for any glaring errors that spell check may have missed. If you have repeated yourself or if something is not as clear as it could be, revise. After making any necessary changes, read over your letter one more time to check for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other errors.

When to Send:

Finally, time sending your letters to arrive at mid-week, rather than on Monday, when deliveries are heaviest, or on Friday, when the weekend rush hits.

Follow-Up:

It is a good idea to follow-up your Congress person's response, or lack thereof, with another brief letter – regardless of the position s/he takes.

- If the Congress person agrees with you, send a one or two sentence letter of thanks for his/her stand in favor of the issue.
- If the Congress person disagrees with your position, reply with a brief letter quoting the section of his/her letter with which you take issue and restate your position.

Further TIPS to Keep in Mind:

Give Your Letter a Bold Title

After the opening address, you may want to write a bold title that summarizes the issue about which you are writing. You can write something like this: Re: H.R. 191 for Increasing Education Funding. After this title line begin your letter with a salutation, e.g., “Dear Senator (last name)” or “Dear Congress person (last name)/Congresswoman (last name).”

Do Your Research

No matter what you are writing about, be knowledgeable. If you have any credentials that lend credibility on the subject, list them. These could include your education, work history, research, and work positions.

Add a Personal Touch

Adding your personal story to your letter is invaluable. It is one thing to write you representative because you are ideologically for or against a proposed action. It is another thing entirely to tell them how something could personally affect you, your family or your community. It does not have to be heart-wrenching. Your story will simply help personalize the issue for a representative, who may have no direct experience with the problems of a particular group or demographic.

Keep it Brief and Focused on One Topic

Congress persons and their staff are busy people. It is important to get to the point quickly and keep the length of your letter to one page (or two if you really have good reason to include more information). If you have more than one topic, split it into two separate letters or two separate faxes.

Keep it Professional

While you are certainly free to express your frustration or disappointment, use a polite tone. Be reasonable, factual, and friendly. Your thoughts are less likely to be completely read and understood if they contain exaggerations, swear words or angry language. Any threats in a letter may result in follow-up on by proper authorities.

Even if you disagree with your Representatives on most issues, be sure to commend them if they have done something right. It will establish that you are fair and will encourage them to pay closer attention to subsequent complaints about their performance.

Your spelling and grammar will also reflect on your letter. Avoid excessive punctuation like exclamation points. Never write in all capital letters, which translates as shouting.

Don't Demand or Expect a Personalized Response

Reasons Why FAXing May Be the Best Approach:

Sending a letter through “snail mail” is good, but letters can take a long time to arrive at the right office. Letters by mail can spend weeks in a universal receiving department being carefully screened and sorted. By then, it could be too late for your voice to make a difference. Even if it arrives before the vote, your Congress person likely will not see the letter directly because of the threat of anthrax and other deadly contaminants.

Faxes, on the other hand, solve all of the problems of emails, phone calls, or “snail mail” letters. They are as instantaneous as an e-mail without the same popularity and non-hard copy format that gets your message lost in the shuffle. You can write a fax in paragraph form so, unlike a phone call, you get across all of your thoughts. Also sending an email fax poses no security risk like “snail mail,” so your Congress person can hold a hard copy of your letter that leaves a more concrete impression.

Don't Forget a Cover Sheet

If you fax your letter, you will want to include a cover sheet. This is the page that is sent before your actual letter. It includes all of your contact information (especially your fax number) as well as the

name, address and phone number of the person you are trying to fax. Most cover sheets also include a small area for comments or notes where you can summarize your purpose for writing. Cover sheets provide a level of confidentiality. Whoever receives the fax will know who it should go to without having to read the letter itself. The cover sheet also lists the number of pages that should be received in case the fax machine has run out of paper or the following pages were not received for some other reason. A cover sheet will also help if your fax is sent online to the wrong phone number. The recipient can see your contact information to notify you that it was not received by your intended party. <https://bebusinessed.com/Congress-fax-numbers/>

Send a Thank You Letter

If your Congress person voted as you wanted him/her to vote, take a few minutes to write and send a fax online to send a short thank you note (especially if you previously wrote them a letter expressing your opinion).

Where Can I Go Fax Something Near Me?

Try: UPS, FedEx, and Other Delivery Service Stores

Go to: <https://bebusinessed.com/online-fax/where-can-i-go-fax-something-near-me/>

If you want to send out a fax from your phone, sign up for an online fax service like **RingCentral Fax** so you can fax on the go with their mobile App.

After the 30-day free trial, RingCentral Fax is only \$7.99/mo which is 25%-60% cheaper than other online fax providers (MyFax, EFax, RapidFax & MetroFax). If you want to cancel, Ringcentral also provides a risk-free 30-day money-back guarantee.

Sources:

<https://www.nolanchart.com/article2717-how-to-write-a-powerful-letter-to-Congress.html>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/write-effective-letters-to-Congress-3322301>

[https://www.artofmanliness.com/2011/06/17/how-to-write-your-Congress person/](https://www.artofmanliness.com/2011/06/17/how-to-write-your-Congress-person/)

<https://www.writeexpress.com/How-to-Write-a-Letter-to-Congress.html>