

## TIPS ON LETTER WRITING

So, you're going to write your Congressman? Good idea. Make it a good letter.

People who think members of Congress pay little or no attention to constituent mail, are plain wrong. Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways Americans have of influencing law-makers. But, members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day. Whether you choose to use the Postal Service or email, here are some tips that will help your letter have impact.

It's usually best to send letters to the Representative from your local Congressional District or the Senators from your state. Your vote helps elect them -- or not -- and that fact alone carries a lot of weight. It also helps personalize your letter.

### Keep It Simple

Your letter should address a single topic or issue. Typed, one-page letters are best. Many PACs (Political Action Committees) recommend a three-paragraph letter structured like this:

1. Say why you are writing and who you are. List your "credentials." (If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email.)
2. Provide more detail. Be factual not emotional. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others. If a certain bill is involved, [cite the correct title or number](#) whenever possible. You can find bill numbers at THOMAS Legislative information. [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov)
3. Close by requesting the action you want taken: a vote for or against a bill, or change in general policy.

The best letters are courteous, to the point, and include specific supporting examples.

### Addressing Members of Congress

To Your Senator:

The Honorable (full name)  
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

To Your Representative:

The Honorable (full name)  
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_

When writing to the Chairperson of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman

Dear Madam Chairwoman

Dear Mr. Speaker

Dear Madam Speaker

The above addresses should be used in email messages, as well as those sent through the Postal Service. Addresses are listed at the end of this bulletin. You can also find them on the state and federal websites.

### To Conclude

Here are some key things you should always and never do in writing to your elected representatives.

#### Always

1. Be courteous and respectful without "gushing."
2. Clearly and simply state the purpose of your letter. If it's about a certain bill, [identify it correctly](#). If

you need help in finding the number of a bill, use the [Thomas Legislative Information System](#).

3. Say who you are. Anonymous letters go nowhere. Even in email, include your correct name, address, phone number and email address. If you don't include at least your name and address, you will not get a response.
4. State any professional credentials or personal experience you may have, especially those pertaining to the subject of your letter.
5. Keep your letter short -- one page is best.
6. Use specific examples or evidence to support your position.
7. State what it is you want done or recommend a course of action.
8. Thank the member for taking the time to read your letter.

### Never

1. Use vulgarity, profanity, or threats. The first two are just plain rude and the third one can get you a visit from the Secret Service. Simply stated, don't let your passion get in the way of making your point,
2. Fail to include your name and address, even in email letters.
3. Demand a response.

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### Identifying Legislation

Cite these legislation identifiers when writing to members of Congress:

House Bills: "**H.R.**\_\_\_\_"

House Resolutions: "**H.RES.**\_\_\_\_"

House Joint Resolutions: "**H.J.RES.**\_\_\_\_"

Senate Bills: "**S.**\_\_\_\_"

Senate Resolutions: "**S.RES.**\_\_\_\_"

Senate Joint Resolutions: "**S.J.RES.**\_\_\_\_"

### SAMPLE LETTER For Legislative Communication

Connie Constituent  
1234 Allegiance Way  
Pledgeville, NY 12345

Date:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
Proper Address

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to ask you to support Bill S 1234. This bill will soon come to a vote in the State Senate. For the past five years it has been working its way through various committees and has been approved by each one.

The purpose of this bill is to help non-dedicated subdivisions in this state. It proposes that one-half of the road and bridge taxes that we now pay be credited to the subdivision in which that taxpayer lives. For example, \$250 of my current tax bill is for roads and bridges. Bill 1234 would specify that one-half, or \$125, be placed in a special fund to help maintain roads in my non-dedicated subdivision.

I think that this is an important bill. It will benefit the community at large by assisting in maintaining roads that are not normally maintained by a city or county government.

Thank you for your support. Your response is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

**SAMPLE LETTER Requesting opinion of Legislator**

Connie Constituent  
1234 Allegiance Way  
Pledgeville, NY 12345

Date:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
Proper Addressing

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_

What is your position on penalties for juvenile offenders convicted of “adult” crimes such as murder?

as a mother of two elementary school age children, I've been particularly troubled by the apparent increased incidence of pre-adolescents committing horrendous, even premeditated crimes, often on school grounds. What is especially troubling is a juvenile penal system that allows a convicted criminal under age 18 to go free when he or she reaches that age.

I understand that a bill proposing dramatic changes in the juvenile penal code could reach the Assembly floor later this term. What is your position on this issue, so vital to our children's safety now and in the future?

I look forward to hearing your position on this issue. Thank you for your service to our community.

Sincerely,

**SAMPLE LETTER For Legislative Thank You**

Connie Constituent  
123 Allegiance Way  
Pledgeville, NY 12345  
Date:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
Proper Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your response to my letter regarding HR1234. I appreciate your support of this important legislation affecting our Veterans. They gave all for us; we need to do all we can for them.

I will certainly share your response with many of our members in the American Legion Auxiliary. We will remember your support at election.

Sincerely,

**MEETING REQUEST SAMPLE (FAX)**

***FAXES ARE THE PREFERRED WAY REQUESTING APPOINTMENTS WITH LEGISLATORS***

FAX COVER SHEET

TO: Mary Alice  
Scheduler  
Senator \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

SENT BY: Your Name (include your email address)  
Unit or Department Position (If you are serving in one)  
Unit # and Name

Sender's Phone: Home, work, and cell

RE: Meeting Requesting

Date:

Dear Mary Alice:

Please accept this as a meeting request with Senator \_\_\_\_\_, for about 10 minutes on \_\_\_\_\_. My schedule is flexible and open between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. would the Senator have some time available?

I am a constituent and I am an active member of the American Legion Auxiliary, Unit 259 in Oneonta New York. I will be in Albany for the American Legion Legislative Hill Day and I would like to visit with you.

Veterans Affairs issues will be the focus of the "Hill Day" and I would like the opportunity to speak with you about some concerns regarding pending Legislation (cite bill #'s)

Your assistance is appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,