

## The Do's and Don'ts of Legislative Letter Writing

In state and national capitols, letters are the barometers that measure political interest. Letters are counted and they do make a difference. But not just any letter is influential. Just as people at the grassroots level have become more organized in their letter writing campaigns, legislators have become savvy in distinguishing a “drummed-up” letter from an expression of personal concern. So it is especially important that your letter be personal, thoughtful, specific, and concise. Your letters should be written with the expectation that they will be read by someone of sensitivity and intelligence, but who may be slightly less well informed than you are on your particular issue.

Here are some tips to consider in writing a convincing letter.

- **Do** spell your legislator's name correctly and know his/her title (e.g. Governor, Senator or Representative). All should be addressed as “The Honorable.”
  - **Do** write as an individual constituent. Because legislators pay the most attention to personal letters from their constituents, it is important that your letter express your own views. Express your views in your own words rather than those of another.
  - **Do** write one page. If you have more information than will fit on one page, include it as an attachment, clearly marked as such and noted in the letter.
  - **Do** cover only one subject. At the top of the page, below the addressee's address write “Re: name of the bill or issue.” This will speed up the routing of the letter. If you have more than one subject which you would like to cover, write a separate letter for each one.
  - **Do** be as specific as possible. Regardless of what you are writing about, be as specific as possible in describing it. If it is a particular bill, try to refer to its number, the person who introduced it, and what it will do. Similarly, if you refer to the position of the delegate, it will demonstrate your specific interest in his/her actions. Show as much knowledge as you can, but don't hesitate to write merely because you are not an “expert.”
  - **Do** make your letter timely. Try to ensure that your letter arrives while the issue is alive.
  - **Do** ask the legislator to do something specific. It is important to ask for a specific action such as: “Please consider the unintended outcomes of budget cuts on Alabama citizens with mental health issues.”
  - **Do** include your name and return address on the letter.
  - **Do** type letters if possible, but handwritten letters are fine if they are legible. Write each legislator individually, avoiding photocopies.
  - **Do** write to your own senator and representative and to others whom you know personally.
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- **Don't** write a letter that demands or insists the legislator vote for or against a certain bill.
  - **Don't** write a chain letter or form letter.
  - **Don't** threaten the legislator with defeat at the next election or bodily harm.
  - **Don't** become a chronic letter writer.
  - **Don't** send copies or form letters.