

Taking Political Action Through Writing Letters and Emails

Jefferson County Democrats

Planning Your Letter or Email

Whether writing a letter (or email) to the editor or a politician, you're likely telling readers about your concerns and persuading them to take action as a result. Ironically, to write most effectively, you should consider and **mention the needs of your readers**. **Grab reader attention right away** by giving useful details about your concern that are **interesting, informative, or important to them and their needs**.

If you're trying to influence attitudes, opinions, or behavior, try to **link your information to things your readers may already know** or believe. And **emphasize how your ideas can help your readers** or people important to them.

But don't write more than you must. Like you, your readers are bombarded with all kinds of information from many sources. Like you, your readers have much on their mind at home, work, and elsewhere. And like you, they don't have the time and even the interest to read, understand and act on all the information they get.

Also, the *Port Townsend & Jefferson County Leader* and the *Peninsula Daily News* in Port Angeles **both prefer letters of 250 or fewer words**. They could edit your message to reduce its length.

These writing guidelines also can apply to **other forms of communication**, from individual Facebook and Twitter posts to personal blogs and websites.

Writing Your Letter

When writing, choose and organize your information and ideas **so your readers can get your message the first time they read it**. They might not have the time or interest to reread it! To do that when writing a letter, **focus on a single issue** and drop details that are not immediately relevant to that issue. Ask yourself, "Do I really need to say this now?"

Make your main point easy to find – at the beginning of your letter. Briefly name and summarize the main issue of interest to you and your readers. Perhaps tell a mini-story that describes a related personal experience.

Then, **recommend what your readers should do** with that information or what follow-up actions an elected official, government agency, or other organization should take. If necessary, **follow that recommended action with relevant facts** that can answer reader questions about who, what, where, when, why and how; for example, causes of the problem you're writing about.

Finally, if it's not already clear in your letter, **rephrase the action you recommend** and give brief suggestions for how to take that action.

Here's a familiar five-paragraph structure for letters:

- **An introductory paragraph** that summarizes the main point of your issue or concern and its relevance to your readers, your community, and you.
- **Up to three paragraphs** that describe recommendations or solutions about the issue(s) you raise; how those ideas can benefit your reader(s), community, and you; and actions you recommend to your reader(s).
- **Conclude** with a strong, factual statement about the issue -- and more details, if needed, about what should happen next.

Finally, when choosing your words and drafting your sentences, **make your letter easy to read** by using familiar words, active verbs, nouns that readers can visualize, short sentences (up to 25 words) that make a single point, and a bulleted list of related facts or actions. Avoid inaccurate or misleading details, jargon, unfamiliar abbreviations, redundant words, vague ideas, and errors in spelling and grammar.

Sample Letter

This sample letter is addressed to an elected official, but you could adapt it as needed for a letter to the editor (preferably, 250 words or less):

- It begins with blanks to fill in your location (Jefferson County, 24th Legislative District, etc.), your opinion (support, oppose, question, etc.), and a brief description of the legislation (or issue) you're writing about.
- The following paragraphs have brief descriptions or explanations of the impact of the legislation (issue), what you like and dislike about it, and your suggestions to improve it.
- Finally, it ends with your specific request for action by your elected official(s).

Dear ...,

As a constituent of yours in [your location], I [your opinion] the proposed legislation about [brief description].

This legislation would have a significant impact on my [family, community, business, school district, etc.] because

I especially like sections in the legislation that [provide some key details that support or explain your opinion). I believe many of your constituents have similar interests.

On the other hand, I support strengthening [revising, eliminating, etc.] sections that [supply some key details that support or explain your opinion). Please collaborate with your colleagues to improve the legislation by making the type of changes I suggest.

Thank you for considering my interests. I urge you to vote [for, against, amend, etc.] the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Contact Information

Submitting Your Letter

Your elected officials: For links to the contact information of national, state, county, and other local officials, visit [this section of the JCD website](#). You also can comment on current state legislation by following links on this [JCD web page](#).

Your local newspapers: Both the *Port Townsend & Jefferson County Leader* and the *Peninsula Daily News* in Port Angeles supply online forms at the links below for sending letters. You also may email letters to them. **Include your phone and email contact information so the newspapers can verify that you sent the letter.**

The [Port Townsend Leader](#) notes: "We welcome letters from our readers. Be consist, preferably under 250 words. We reserve the right to edit all letters for style, brevity, space, and clarity. No anonymous letters or thank you letters will be printed."

Email: news@ptleader.com.

The [Peninsula Daily News](#) notes: "We encourage letters to the editor of 250 words or fewer from readers on subjects of local interest. ... Please – send us only one letter or column per month. Letters sent to or published in other newspapers, anonymous letters, personal attacks, letters advocating boycotts, letters sent from Internet Web sites, letters to other people and mass mailings and commercial appeals are not published."

Email: letters@peninsuladailynews.com; fax: 360-417-3521; mail: Letters to the Editor, Peninsula Daily News, P.O. Box 1330, Port Angeles WA 98362

Other Resources

Writing to Editors

[Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor](#) – American Civil Liberties Union

[Writing Letters to the Editor](#) – Community Tool Box, Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas

[How to Communicate with Journalists](#) – Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting

[How to Write Letters to the Editor that Really Get Attention](#) -- Indivisible

[Writing Effective Letters to the Editor](#) – National Education Association

[Tips on Writing Effective Letters to the Editor](#) – Reclaim Democracy!

[Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor](#) – Union of Concerned Scientists

Writing to Elected Officials

[Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials](#) – American Civil Liberties Union

[Why Write to an Elected Official](#) – ACLU of Washington

[Tips for Sending Effective Letters to Elected Officials](#) – American Planning Association

[Writing Letters to Elected Officials](#) – Community Tool Box, Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas

[How to Write a Letter to Your Elected Official](#) – Mom's Clean Air Force

[Seven ways to write more effective letters to elected representatives](#) – Public Coach & Gray-Grant Communications

[Letter to an Elected Official](#) – Working America

Democratic Party Platforms

[Jefferson County Democrats](#)

[Washington State Democrats](#)

[National Democratic Party](#)

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