

# Writing Your Government Official

*Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.*

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Most communication with elected officials is now conducted through email. These emails often require entering your address to verify that you live in their district. For this reason, it is generally most effective to contact only the officials who represent you directly, although in a few cases it may be appropriate to contact other officials with specific expertise in your area of concern.

## Where to Write

Consider which official will be able to address the problem. If it is a local concern, city or county officials may be the ones to write. For state and national issues, representatives and senators are a better choice. While representatives and senators for the state and national level use the same titles, you will want to check that you are contacting a state senator instead of a national one. Most officials who do not represent you directly will forward mail to your representative.

### Local Officials

You can usually find contact information for your local officials by calling your city hall or searching their websites.

### State Representatives

Every citizen is represented at the state level by a governor, state senators, and state house members. You can find their names and contact information on the official Utah websites:

<https://house.utah.gov/house-members/>

<http://senate.utah.gov/contact/index.html>

### National Senators and Congressmen

Every American citizen is represented on a national level by one house representative and two senators. You can find names and contact information for your congressional representatives on this site:

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

[https://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

## Presentation

Use a respectful mode of address, rather than first names or nicknames, to establish a polite tone.

To One Official	To Various Officials
Dear Senator/Representative	Dear Representatives
Dear President	Dear (List first and last names)
Dear Mayor	To Whom it May Concern
Dear Council Member	Dear (Title of Department)

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## Organization

- Open with a description of your expertise or reason for concern, or with a compelling anecdote.
- Throughout the body of your letter, offset statistics and facts using bullet points with discussion of those facts in short paragraphs to help the representative understand your evidence quickly.
- The end of your letter should return to your proposal or main concern.

## Tips

**Be brief.** Keep paragraphs short and stick to the most relevant facts and anecdotes.

**Establish credibility.** Use a respectful tone. State your personal qualifications (long-time residency in an area, for instance, or professional or educational experience with an issue.)

**Frame your position.** See below for details.

**Include other perspectives.** Discussion of drawbacks to other positions shows your representative that you are not one-sided or ill-informed.

**Consider political capital.** See below for details.

## Framing your Position

Consider your representative's voting record and stated positions. For example, if your representative has clearly stated a position against minimum wage, and you are in favor, your job becomes more difficult. A good move is to look at other issues the official is in favor of and use them to argue for your position. For example, let's say they love small businesses. You could use their opinion on small businesses to argue that minimum wage is good because small businesses need happy workers to be successful. This rhetorical decision is often more convincing than a sad story or rant because you are aligning your argument with something they already support. It is also a good idea to show evidence of your position to convince an official of its importance.

## Considering "Political Capital"

In most cases, in order to enact legislation or effect policy changes, politicians have to convince others to join them. The influence they wield is sometimes called their "political capital." When representatives advocate for causes that never change, especially ones not central to their stated agendas, their political capital gets spent—or rather, wasted. Losing political capital can shake the confidence of voters, endanger chances of re-election, and alienate colleagues.

To strengthen your position, show your officials which other colleagues will likely side with them on this issue. It may be helpful to reference their names in your letter. You can also demonstrate public support for your cause with polls, rallies, signed petitions, and anecdotes about those who have experience with the cause.