

## Writing Letters to Policy Makers in Congress... **Some Do's and Don'ts to make your letter effective and hit the mark.**

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.

### **Think Locally**

It is 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. Sending the same "cookie-cutter" message to every member of Congress may grab attention but rarely much consideration.

### **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.
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 States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To Your Representative:

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

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.

### **Finding Their Addresses Senate and House of Representatives**

[Contacting the Congress](#) is one of the Internet's most complete sources of contact information for the current Congress.

[Email Addresses & Web Sites for Congress](#) is a massive project of the [University of Michigan Library Documents Center](#). It's just a text page, but the information is priceless.

### **To Conclude**

There 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.