

How To Series: Writing To Congress – Elected Officials

We have become so dependent on using convenient e-mail that we tend to no longer use other methods of communication.. With the rise in electronic communication, many special interest groups have used e-mail to bombard elected official with form bulk messages. As such, bulk or blast e-mails, generally have lost their effectiveness with elected officials.

A 2002 survey of Minnesota legislators stated e-mail is effective under certain circumstances. When an e-mail is personally written by a constituent, it can be as effective as sending a letter.

How can we write an effective and powerful letter? Letters and faxes are reported to be the most effective and persuasive way of communicating our views. One letter from a concerned constituent will carry more weight than hundreds of form e-mails. Hand written letters are so rare they are even more effective.

These helpful suggestions will help you write an effective and persuasive letter:

- **Keep your letter short.** Limit it to one page and only one issue.
- **Identify yourself and the issue.**
In the first paragraph of your letter state who you are and what issue you are writing about. If you are referring to a specific bill, identify it by number (e.g. H.R.1234 or S. 1357) and the name of the bill.
- **Focus on your main points or concerns.**
There may be many reasons you support, or oppose, saving the habitat of the Bald Eagle. Select no more than three of the strongest points and develop them clearly.
- **Make it personal.**
Tell your legislator why the issue matters to you, your family, your community. Make a connection to the legislator. Did you attend his/her town meeting?
- **Ask for a reply.**
Include your name and address on both your letter and envelope.
- **Trust yourself.**
Be polite, courteous and confident in your understanding of the issue. It is very possible that the legislator may know less than you.

Thank elected officials when they vote the way you requested.

Addressing Correspondence:

To a Senator:

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

To a Representative:

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

Dear Representative:

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee, or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Dear Mr. or Madam Chairman, or Dear Mr. or Madam Speaker