

Name _____

Period _____

Read the following article carefully and make notes in the margin as you read. Your notes should include:

*Comments that show you understand the article. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important sections may serve this purpose.)

*Questions you have that show what you are wondering about as you read.

*Notes that differentiate between fact and opinion.

*Observations about how the writer's strategies (organization, diction, perspective, support) and choices affect the article.

You must complete your responses by providing a full MLA citation for the article.

Your margin notes are part of your grade for this assignment.

Tips for writing effective letters to Congress

By Robert Longley, *ThoughtCo.com* 03/05/2018

Lawmakers in the U.S. Congress make new laws and help decide what should be done about our country's problems. They may not always be sure about how they should vote on a given issue, or what position they should take. A letter from you could make all the difference.

People who think members of Congress pay little or no attention to mail from ordinary citizens are just plain wrong. Well-thought-out personal letters are one of the most effective ways Americans have of influencing the lawmakers they elect.

Members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day, so you will want your letter to stand out. Whether you choose to use the U.S. Postal Service or email, here are some tips that will help your letter have a greater effect.

Think Locally

Congress is made of the Senate and the House of Representatives. In the Senate, there are two senators for each state. Lawmakers in the House are called representatives, and there is one for each congressional district. The United States is divided into 435 congressional districts.

It's usually better to send letters to the representative from your local congressional district or a senator from your state. Your vote, or your parents' votes, can help them get reelected, and that fact alone carries a great deal of weight. It also helps if your letter is clearly addressed to them specifically. Congresspeople receive many messages that also are sent to every other member of Congress. A letter written just to them is much more likely to grab their attention.

It's a good idea to send a letter rather than an email. While email is convenient and quick, it may not have the same influence as a physical letter. You can go online to find out which lawmakers are from your state. You can find their office address on their official websites.

Keep Your Letter Simple And To The Point

Your letter will be more effective if you address a single topic or issue rather than a **variety** of issues you may feel passionate about. Typed, one-page letters are best. Say why you are writing and who you are. Mention that you live in the congressperson's district or state. It also doesn't hurt to mention if you or your parents voted for or donated to them.

Be factual and not emotional when referring to the issue you are writing about. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others. Close your letter by **requesting** the action you want the congressperson to take. It may be a vote for or against a bill, a change in their approach to an issue, or some other action, but be specific. The best letters are polite, to the point and include specific information and examples.

Identifying Legislation

Members of Congress have many items on their agendas, so it's best to be as specific as possible regarding your issue. When writing about a particular bill or piece of legislation, include its official number so it's clear what you're referring to. If you need help in finding the number of a bill, use the Thomas Legislative Information System.

Addressing Members Of Congress

There is also a specific way to address congresspeople and senators in a letter. If, for example, a congressman's name is Thomas Smith, the header at the top of your letter should refer to him as "The Honorable Thomas Smith." It should also include the room number and name of his House office building, along with the rest of his Washington address. However, you should only use a congressperson's last name when directly addressing them.

If you're writing a letter to a senator, start your letter with:

The Honorable (full name)
(room #) (name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator (last name):

If you're writing to a representative, start with:

The Honorable (full name)
(room #) (name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Representative (last name):

Key Things To Remember

Here are some key things you should always do when writing to your elected representatives. Be courteous, respectful and clearly state the purpose of your letter. If you are writing about a particular bill, make sure you are referring to it correctly. Also, state who you are. If you don't include at least your name and address, you will not get a response.

State any personal experience you may have that is relevant to the subject of your letter. Keep your letter short — one page is best. Use specific examples or evidence to support your position. State what it is you want to be done, or recommend a course of action. End your letter by thanking the congressperson for taking the time to read your letter.

What Not To Do

No matter how strongly you may feel about an issue, your letter will be more effective if it's calm, well-reasoned and polite. If you're angry about something, write your letter, then edit it the next day to make sure you're using a respectful tone.

Do not use curse words or threats. The first is just plain rude, and the second can get you in trouble. Simply stated, don't let your passion get in the way of making your point.

Do not demand a response. You may not get one no matter what, and a demand is simply another rude gesture that does little for your case.

Also, avoid using prewritten, boilerplate text. Many organizations will send out a prepared text for people to use, but try not to simply copy and paste this into your letter. Use it as a guide to help you make your

point, but write the letter in your own words and from your own point of view. A letter that says the exact same thing as thousands of other letters will not attract much notice. But if you follow these steps, your letter could really make a difference.

RACE response: What are the central ideas of the article? Use at least two details from the article to support your response. To elaborate, explain, and extend: write several sentences in which you link information given in the article to your own observations and experience.

Close Reading: Interaction with Article/Annotation	
Points	Criteria
5-4	Insightful and thoughtful interaction with the article (questions, inferences, comments, connections, reflections). At least 1 <i>thoughtful</i> annotation per paragraph/segment.
3-2	Moderate insight and interaction with article (questions, inferences, connections, comments, reflections). Fewer than 1 annotation per paragraph/segment.
1-0	Minimal or no insight and interaction with article. Fewer than 3 annotations.
R.A.C.E. Response	
Points	Criteria
5-4	Student writes a detailed response restating the question, including the title of the article and author, textual evidence from the article, explains/extends/elaborates on the evidence, using transitions and a closing sentence. Appropriate amount of borrowed vs. original material
3-2	Student writes a response which may lack a restatement of question, the title of article and author, textual evidence, explanation of evidence, transitional words, and a closing sentence. Too much borrowed vs. original material.
1-0	Student writes a few sentences but no cohesive, well-organized paragraph. May lack a restatement of question, the title of article and author, textual evidence, explanation of evidence, transitional words, and a closing sentence. More than half borrowed vs. original material.
Mechanics	
Points	Criteria
5-4	Student has no spelling, capitalization , punctuation, or grammar mistakes
3-2	Student has some spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or grammar mistakes
1-0	Student has many spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or grammar mistakes
Formatting and Citation	
Points	Criteria
5-4	Student has no formatting and/or citation mistakes
3-2	Student has some formatting and/or citation mistakes
1-0	Student has many formatting and/or citation mistakes or has not formatted/cited the article at all