

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

People who think members of the U.S. Congress pay little or no attention to **constituent** mail are just plain wrong. Concise, 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 stand out. Whether you choose to use the U.S. Postal Service or email, here are some tips that will help you write a letter to Congress that has an impact.

### **Think Locally**

It's 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. It's also a good idea to think about the effectiveness of all of your communication options. For instance, a face-to-face meeting at an event, town hall, or the representative's local office can often leave the biggest impression.

That is not always an option though. Your next best bet for expressing your opinion is a formal letter, then a phone call to their office. While email is convenient and quick, it may not have the same influence as the other, more traditional, routes.

### **Finding Your Legislator's Address**

There are a few ways that you can find the addresses of all of your representatives in Congress.

The U.S. Senate is easy because each state has two senators. [Senate.gov](http://Senate.gov) has an easy to navigate directory of all current senators. You will find links to their website, their email and phone number, as well as the address to their office in Washington, D.C.

The House of Representatives is a little trickier because you need to search for the person representing your particular district within the state.

The easiest way to do so is to type in your ZIP code under "Find Your Representative" at [House.gov](http://House.gov). This will narrow down your options, but you may need to refine it based on your physical address because ZIP codes and congressional districts do not coincide.

In both houses of Congress, the representative's official website will also have all the contact information you need, including the locations of their local offices.

### **Keep Your Letter Simple**

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. Many Political Action Committees (PACs) recommend a three-paragraph letter structured like this:

Say why you are writing and who you are. List your "credentials" and state that you are a constituent. It also doesn't hurt to mention if you voted for or donated to them. If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email. Provide more detail.

Be factual and 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.

Close by requesting the action you want to be taken. It may be a vote for or against a bill, a change in general policy or some other action, but be specific. The best letters are courteous, to the point and include specific supporting examples.

### **Identifying Legislation**

Members of Congress have a lot of 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 the official number so they know exactly what you're referring to (it also helps your credibility).

If you need help in finding the number of a bill, use the Thomas Legislative Information System. Cite these legislation identifiers:

House Bills: "H.R.\_"  
House Resolutions: "H.RES.\_"  
House Joint Resolutions: "H.J.RES.\_"  
Senate Bills: "S.\_"  
Senate Resolutions: "S.RES.\_"  
Senate Joint Resolutions: "S.J.RES.\_"

### **Addressing Members Of Congress**

There is also a formal way to address members of Congress. Use these headers to begin your letter, filling in the appropriate name and addresses for your congressperson. Also, it's best to include the header in an email message.

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

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

### **Contacting The U.S. Supreme Court**

The justices of the U.S. Supreme Court do not have email addresses, but they do read letters from citizens. You can mail letters using the address found on the [SupremeCourt.gov](http://SupremeCourt.gov) website.

### **Key Things To Remember**

Here are some key things you should always and never do when writing to your elected representatives. Be courteous and respectful without "gushing." Clearly and simply state the purpose of your letter. If it's about a certain bill, identify it correctly. 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. State any professional credentials or personal experience

you may have, especially those pertaining 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. Thank the member for taking the time to read your letter.

**What Not To Do**

Just because they represent the voters does not mean that members of Congress are subject to abuse or belittlement. As impassioned as you may be about an issue, your letter will be more effective if it's written from a calm, logical perspective. If you're angry about something, write your letter then edit the next day to ensure you're conveying a courteous, professional tone. Also, make sure to avoid these pitfalls.

**Do not** 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.

**Do not** fail to include your name and address, even in email letters. Many representatives prioritize comments from their constituents and a letter in the mail may be the only way you receive a response.

**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.

**Do not** use boilerplate text. Many grassroots organizations will send out a prepared text to people interested in their issue, but try not to simply copy and paste this into your letter. Use it as a guide to help you make the point, and write the letter in your own words with your personal perspective. Getting thousands of letters that say the exact same thing can diminish the impact.

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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