

# Letter Writing: a lost art?

Cheryl Ambrose



CFUW  
**ONTARIO  
COUNCIL**

Making your views known to your elected representatives on the effect of the law or public policy on your family or community, is one of the most effective ways we have under our system of parliamentary democracy.

## 7 Reasons to Write a Letter

1. Letters take effort
2. Letters are personal
3. Letters are effective
4. Letters can finish a conversation
5. Letter are a meaningful way to say “thank you”
6. Letters document your concerns
7. Silence implies consent



**Letters take effort:** The single greatest impact comes from the fact that you took the time to write a letter on an issue. It makes more of an impression than the details of the letter itself. From the perspective of a politician or political party, a letter from one constituent is interpreted as speaking for a hundred other citizens who hold the same point of view but did not write.

**Letters are personal:** A personal letter to your MP or MPP can be an effective tool for change. A 2009 Nanos Research survey of 44 sitting MPs and 7 former MPs regarding MP-constituent interactions found that 88% were motivated to act based on a message in a personal letter, versus 45% who said they would act based on a form letter. And a mere 8% of parliamentarians surveyed said that an online campaign has changed their mind on an issue.

**Letters are effective:** Every politician pays close attention to the mail they receive from their constituents; its their gauge of public opinion. If your representative won their seat by a slim margin, they are even more likely to pay attention to letters and report back to their leaders and cabinet ministers whether new measures are popular or unpopular in their ridings, explaining that their riding could be lost if measures are not reversed.

**Letters can finish a conversation:** Although your initial contact is important in getting your local representative's attention, a follow-up letter is key. Thank the member for

taking the time to respond to your initial query and commend them on any steps taken. Then reemphasize the result you're after, or any issues you feel have not been addressed. A second letter shows that you're invested in the issue. If you're really concerned, set up a face-to-face meeting with your representative or a member of their staff.

**Letters are a meaningful way to say “thank you”**

**Letters document your concerns:** Staff keep a tally of the letters their MPP or MP receives on each topic and what side of the debate constituents are on. If the opinions don't directly contradict a party platform, original letters can sway how the MP votes.

**Silence implies consent:** Your elected representative (or party) assumes a lack of response to an action as tacit approval of that action. And if you're silent on an issue, others may interpret your silences as consent.

<https://cpaws-southernalberta.org/how-to-write-a-letter-to-your-elected-officials/>

<https://cpj.ca/writing-letter-your-mp/>

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/four-ways-to-get-a-politician-to-pay-attention/article4303978/>

Federal  
Provincial  
Municipal

## Write to the Right Person

Your Member of Parliament (MPs and MPPs) maintain both Legislative and Constituency offices. If you are writing about a personal problem, write to their local office. If you are writing about legislation, or something to do with the government, write to the House of Commons or to Queen's Park.

*Your **MP of MPP is your representative***, the person who represents you (whether you voted for them or not), and who must be sensitive to your views. Do not send a letter to a representative outside your riding (unless it's a minister or an opposition critic). MPs or MPPs show little regard for letters that come from outside the riding, though sometimes it may be appropriate to contact other MPPs or MPs. For example, when the Chair of a Parliamentary Committee wishes to monitor broad public opinion at a critical point in the legislative process, or when you have special expertise in a specific area in which a Parliamentary Committee is developing policy, your communication with them can be important.

Remember that if, as a CFUW club, you wish to contact someone other than your own representative, you may not refer to CFUW in your correspondence. Contact Ontario Council or CFUW if you are interested in developing communications beyond your own MPP or MP.

## Federal Government

- Citizenship and Immigration
- Environment
- Fisheries and Oceans
- Health
- Industry
- Justice
- Natural Resources
- Old Age Security
- Public safety
- Transport
- Treasury board



## Provincial Government

- Children and Youth Services
- Community and Social Services
- Education
- Energy
- Environment
- Family Benefits
- Health Care Delivery
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Labour
- Natural Resources



## Municipal Government

- Arts and Community
- Building and Health Inspection
- By-Laws
- Environment
- Libraries
- Parks and Recreation
- Planning and Zoning
- Policing and Fire Protection
- Solid Waste Management
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Water and Sewer





Your Letter



## Be Accurate

- You don't need to be an expert, but you must be accurate
- Fact check, using credible sources
- Avoid emotional arguments



While you don't need to be an expert to communicate with your politicians regarding issues you are passionate about, you do need to be accurate  
Fact check and beware of false or misleading information in your sources  
Rely on the facts and avoid emotional arguments

## Be Clear

- Clearly state your purpose
- Briefly introduce your concerns
- Cite Bill number, if appropriate
- Make a concrete request



Start with a clear statement of purpose about a particular action.

Briefly introduce concerns.

For example: "I am writing to express my concern about .... I ask that you support a move to ... ." Repeat this request in the last paragraph. A request such as "please pass legislation immediately which will keep oil wells out of our parks" has much more authority and is a better guide to action than "Please bear in mind the potential conflict between resource and natural values."

Make a concrete request:

## Be Concise

- Keep your letter brief
- Limit it to a single issue
- Write simply, using plain language



Keep your letter brief (1 page is ideal)

Address only a single issue in each letter

Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness.

Use plain, simple language. Writing simply helps avoid confusion or miscommunication.

## Be Personal

- Use your own words
- Include personal experiences
- Give examples of community impact
- Request a personal response



Personal letters carry more weight than pre-printed materials or postcards

## Be Political

- If you're writing on behalf of your club, use club stationery
- Explain how your request benefits the community or public as a whole
- Include a written brief, or other informational materials
- Request commitment to a specific action
- Ask for your representative's position and how they intend to vote on relevant legislation



## Emails work too

- Emails and posted letters are handled the same way by Parliamentary staff
- MPs ranked emails above face-to-face, mail, or phone communication as their preferred way to hear from constituents
- Follow letter-writing guidelines
- Keep it brief and focused, using the correct style of address for the representative
- Include your address and postal code in your signature line



## Launch a Letter-writing Campaign

- Join forces with friends, colleagues and relevant organizations to contact a representative on the issue
- An issue gets more attention if your representative receives multiple letters
- Share your letter with your network, encouraging them to personalize it



## Follow Up!

- Keep a copy of your letter to refer to when you receive a response
- Send reminders of your requests and their commitments
- Write to thank them for their response

