



Tips for Students: Writing as an Advocate for Change

The primary roles of an advocate are to explain the issue at hand in such a way that the truth of the matter is clear, and to express it to the right people at the right time to get the desired result! In general, writing as advocates for change, whether it's for a letter, for the press, for an essay or report requires that we are brief and persuasive, that we take a personal but respectful approach, and that we are clear and direct about our positions.

Letters are a very important way that citizens who choose to advocate for a particular type of change get this information across to the right people. Just follow these simple steps to write an effective advocacy letter:

- 1) Carefully choose your target, or the person you want to write to, and what you ask this person to do. You should choose someone who has some power to help further your cause or solve your problem, and you should ask that person to do something that is reasonably within her or his power to do. By the same token, you should try to choose someone who is accountable to you in some way, someone who has a good reason to care what you think about a particular issue.
- 2) Open your letter with a brief, direct statement of who you are and why you're writing. For example, "I am a 10th grade student at Durham School of the Arts, and I'm writing to ask you to vote YES on a new IPM policy for Durham Public Schools."
- 3) Tell your story. What reasons do you have for caring about this issue? Are you, or is someone close to you, directly affected by this issue? You should take any opportunities you might have to establish a connection with the person you're writing to. You can do this by acknowledging shared experiences, i.e. "like your son, my sister has asthma that can be triggered by exposure to pesticides." Or, you can do this by taking the time to thank the decision maker for things they've done in the past that you agreed with, i.e. "thank you very much for your vote in favor of ..."
- 4) What do you want this person to do? Don't be shy, tell them exactly what it is!
- 5) Why should they should do this thing? You should state the reason briefly here, and enclose additional documents or resources that explain the reasons further.
- 6) What information can you share with this person to support your position? Here, you should list each enclosure, or each resource you want this person to be aware of.
- 7) Briefly restate your request, and thank the target for her or his consideration.
- 8) How would you like this person to follow up with you, and by when? How will you follow up with them, if you haven't yet heard from them by that time? You should state these things clearly, but politely.
- 9) At the very bottom, after your closing and signature, you should list all of the people to whom you will send copies of this letter. This shows the person reading the letter that you are not the only person eager to

hear about his or her response!