

How to write to your MP

Why write to your MP? MPs need to hear from their constituents. They depend on their constituents to educate them about what issues are most important to them..

Writing a letter only takes a short amount of your time but it ensures that the people who make decisions on your behalf, every day, know how you want to be represented. Your MP receives hundreds of messages each week on a wide range of issues – your letter may well be the most interesting one that they receive!

▶ Why not write directly to the relevant Minister?

The purpose of a RESULTS action might be to encourage the Secretary of State (for International Development, for instance) to increase investment in a certain programme or intervention that has proven effectiveness. Rather than write to the Minister directly we usually write to our MPs.

We do this for two reasons:

01 Writing to your MP greatly increases your likelihood of receiving a response. The vast majority of MPs will almost always respond to letters from constituents and will be happy to forward your request on to the relevant Minister (even if they disagree with you). In turn, the Minister will be obliged by Parliamentary convention to respond to letters from an MP.

02 You can educate your MP in the process. Even if your MP is not the direct target of the action, your letter provides them with an opportunity to learn about the issue and take action themselves.

There will be occasions where it is more strategic to write directly to other decision-makers, such as the Secretary of State for International Development, Prime Minister or the heads of key international institutions, such as the World Bank. The same tips will apply for those letters.

▶ Why doesn't RESULTS provide templates for letters?

MPs and their researchers have confirmed on numerous occasions that an original letter sent by one committed, passionate constituent is far more powerful than a pile of identical letters or postcards. Mass email actions and template letters have less impact because the MP knows that they only take a few seconds to complete and are not necessarily representative of the priorities of their constituents. The fact that you have taken the time to craft a personalised and well-informed letter demonstrates to the MP that there are people in their constituency that care deeply about an issue. In turn, your opinions are likely to be taken more seriously as a result.

▶ Handwritten or email?

Every MP is different. Some are happy to correspond with constituents via email whereas others give a preference to written letters.

The best postal address for your MP is their Westminster address (House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA). If your MP is not in Westminster, the post is automatically forwarded on to them.

▶ Writing your letter

Top Tips

Be succinct – aim for your letter to be no longer than one and a half sides of A4.

Keep to the point – focus on one issue and don't try and cover too many things in one letter.

Don't forget to include your address- so that your MP knows where to send the response.

Check your MP's correct title- do you address them as Mr, Mrs, Dr, Sir, Rt. Hon? You can check by looking up your MP on the official Parliament website: www.parliament.uk.

Structuring your letter:

01 Introduction. If this is your first letter to your MP, you might want to start by introducing yourself and sharing why you care about the issue that you are raising. If you have a personal connection to the topic of your letter then this is a great way of engaging your MP and conveying your passion and commitment. Remember to acknowledge your MP for any supportive actions that they have already taken – MPs rarely hear the words ‘thank you’ from their constituents. Also, check the website www.theyworkforyou.com as you can find lots of details about your MP and particularly their voting record. If they are interested in international development, you should use this in your opening.

02 Use the EPIC format. The acronym ‘EPIC’ is a useful way to remember how to structure the main part of your letter. After the introductory paragraph, your letter should follow this structure:

E = Engage your MP. Get your MP’s attention with a dramatic fact or short statement.

P = State the problem. Present the causes of the problem you just introduced. How widespread or serious is the problem?

I = Inform the MP about the solutions. Develop your solution by giving examples of how and where it has worked, how it is cost-effective and how it has benefited the poorest.

C = Call to Action. Now that you’ve engaged your MP, presented the problem and informed them of a solution, you need to let them know what you want them to do about it.

03 Ask for a response.



What to do afterwards

Pressing ‘send’ or putting your letter in the post is not the end of your action!

01 Congratulate yourself. You have taken an important action to help generate the political will to end poverty.

02 Follow up with your MP. If you haven’t had an acknowledgement of your letter after a couple of weeks, give your MP’s office a ring to check they have received your letter.

03 Share your reply. When you receive a response from your MP, tell you Group Leader and share a copy with the RESULTS office so that they can collate all of the responses.

04 Be encouraged! Even if it seems that the response you received individually wasn’t great, don’t be down heartened. It is the strength of the RESULTS network that drives change, and by writing that letter you have directly inputted into that collective effort.