

# TIPS ON TALKING TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Talking to an elected official may seem intimidating at first, but it is important to remember that it is a normal part of their job. Especially if you live in their district, they want to know what you think and how they can help. Below are some tips on how you can increase your effectiveness in communicating with your legislators.

To find out who the elected officials are in your area, please visit

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

## How to address your legislator:

When addressing a member of the state legislature use the following protocols:

Senator: "Senator (last name)"

Member of the House of Representatives: "Representative (last name)"

Governor: "Governor (last name)"

Lt. Governor: "Governor (last name)"

Speaker of the House: "Mr./Madam Speaker"

Chairmen or chairwoman "Chairmen (last name), or Madam Chair "(last name)"

## Prior to the Meeting (either in person or on the phone)

- *Do Some Homework*

Try to know the basics about a piece of legislation you are going to address. If there isn't any specific legislation, be able to articulate what you are concerned about and why.

Practice your "elevator speech" before you go into the meeting with the legislator or the staff member who works for the legislator. An "elevator speech" is a 1-2 minute speech that explains what you want and why you want it. It is named this because it is suppose to be short. You may have more time to make your points, but you always need to be prepared to make your pitch quickly.

Think about the points that will be brought up against your point of view. The legislator always wants to know who will be against any issue. Be honest. Tell them who or what organization may oppose it, but then give your reason why you think your view is what he/she should support. Be sure and speak of the opposition in a professional way.

- *Call the office and ask to speak the person who schedules the legislator's time. Ask them to schedule an appointment for you with the legislator.*

If the legislator is unavailable, ask to schedule an appointment with the staff member who handles their education issues. Don't feel slighted if you don't get to speak to the legislator every time. Legislative staff members work very closely with the legislator and they are good allies to have.

- *What to Take with You*

Business Cards

One-page document that lists the key information about the issue you want to discuss

- *Be Personal*  
Tell them a little about yourself—where you live, what you do for a living, if you are representing yourself or an organization (your school district, TCEA, or another organization). Be sure to tell them that you live in their district (if you do). Connect your talking points to your story (how it has impacted students in your school or district).
- *Provide Data*  
If possible provide at least one piece of data that will support your point of view. Don't drown them in data, you can always provide them a short brief on your topic. Select one key piece of data that helps sell your point of view.
- *Be Focused*  
Remember they have only a few minutes to share with you so stay on topic. Also, don't let the legislator change the subject either. Be polite, but be firm.
- *Be Positive*  
Don't be argumentative. You may not agree with the stand your legislator is taking on this particular issue but it is important not to burn any bridges. Little is gained by arguing with your legislator. Keep reminding them how this issue affects the students of your school district. Don't be defensive. They may ask tough questions. They are probably asking the questions that will be asked of them. Give them solid information that will help them justify why they should support your issue. Always remember that the legislative process involves compromises, but you always have the right to participate in the process. Just be positive while you firmly state your positions. Remember your goal is to have a long-term relationship. You won't always agree with your legislator. You are looking for common ground on the issues in which you are interested.
- *Make the "Ask"*  
Don't leave without asking them to support your issue. If there is a bill associated with the issue, be specific and ask them to support the bill. You can ask them, "Will you support this legislation?" Ask them if they have any questions or need any additional information
- *End the Meeting*  
Don't stay too long...Thank them for their time and attention
- *Follow-up*  
Send a thank you note and anything else you promised. Consider inviting them to your school or school district to let them see students and teachers using technology.

### Keys to Good Letter Writing – Letters to Editors

- Use a clear point of view:  
Give the reader a clear “take away.” If the reader can’t remember your point of view five minutes after putting down the paper, you’ve failed.
- Make a simple argument – Keep it under 200 words:  
Don’t try to be a lawyer and look at all sides. Take a side and make your point. Distill your ideas to a pure expression of your beliefs.
- Stick to one idea as far as possible:  
The most frustrating thing about writing for politics is what you have to leave out. Don’t ramble and try to say too much. You’ll lose the reader.
- Write with warmth and understanding; not anger:  
You can’t sell an idea unless you’re likeable. You must establish a connection with the reader.  
Anger convinces no one. The mind rejects the unpleasant and seeks friendlier places to be.
- Educate the reader about something:  
With Google and Wikipedia there is no excuse other than laziness for getting the facts wrong.  
After some research you can educate your reader with something they didn’t know. They like that!
- Above all: be brief

### Final Point

- Let it simmer. It’s a dish best eaten cold.
- You can’t write your letter or op-ed and do final edits at the same time. You’re too close to it and you can’t see your mistakes.
- Best to walk away from it for a time, three hours or more and then read it—as if for the first time.
- Now you can see how it reads and you will know how to fix it.

For a complete list of newspapers in the Washington state area, visit:

[https://www.sos.wa.gov/library/wa\\_newspapers.aspx](https://www.sos.wa.gov/library/wa_newspapers.aspx)