Five Elements of a Letter

1. A brief overview of the incident in question. (“This letter is in regards to...“)
   - For a class related concern, provide relevant information including: the semester of instruction, name of the class, and the instructor’s name. (“This letter is in regards to the Fall 2014 class OUO 104 taught by Dr. So-and-so.”)
   - Relevant details for non-class concerns can specifically address an action or decision. (“This letter is in regards to the findings of the committee.”)
   - The name of the specific person/entity/policy of concern, if applicable.

2. A thesis or succinct statement regarding your concern. For example:
   - “I am writing to request a higher grade in the course.”
   - “I am writing regarding a policy that I feel was applied incorrectly.”
   - “I am writing because there have been ongoing disputes with So-and-so.”

3. An explanation of what occurred and why you are seeking a different outcome. This will usually consist of two or three compelling reasons.
   - Consider including a timeline of events, if applicable.
   - Consider referring to attached documents, if applicable.
   - Aim to be concise and avoid making a “laundry list” of complaints.

4. A request detailing a desired outcome.
   - “Ideally, I’ve provided you with enough information to see why I don’t feel this policy applies in this situation.”
   - “I hope you will reconsider the decision to remove me from the program.”

5. A request for follow-up or “call to action”.
   - “I would appreciate if you could please notify me of your decision within the next week.”
   - “If available, I’d greatly appreciate having an ongoing discussion about my concern. Would you be open to meeting within the next few days?”

Remember the 4 C’s: Be Clear, Concise, Concrete, and Courteous

Letter Length?

Letters including this information are generally 1 to 2 pages in length depending on the concern. Grade dispute letters are generally shorter, while graduate dispute letters are generally longer.
Clear requests reduce ambiguity. Hitting the right tone can be a difficult task, however, as the addition of just a few words can have large impacts. Be thoughtful of the tone you want to communicate. For example, compare the two sentences below:

**Passive:**
“I’m writing you to request that a grade be entered for class by the end of next week.”

**Direct:**
“Please enter a grade by next week.”

A professional tone and concise argumentation are good practice.

- Policy memo-writing techniques may provide a useful starting point.
- Clear argumentation is always helpful when communicating.
- Consider using the active voice — and understand the difference:
- Examples and guides available at these sites:
  - [http://twp.duke.edu/](http://twp.duke.edu/)
  - [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

*Please use the pdf version on our website to directly link to these resources

The Office of the University Ombuds is always available to talk with you about addressing and communicating your concerns and needs, and is willing to review completed letter drafts.

**Contact Us:**
Office of the University Ombuds
Student Services Building
Ground Floor, Room G1.404
(512) 471 · 3825
utombuds@austin.utexas.edu
https://ombuds.utexas.edu/student

The University of Texas at Austin
University Ombuds

*Updated Summer 2018*