

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.

PROFESSIONAL TONE?

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."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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/>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/>

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

REMEMBER:

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:

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