



BEYOND WAR[®]

Letter Writing
Guidelines

152

"Influencing The Decision-Making Process"

Letter Writing Guidelines Kit

Beyond War
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PREFACE

As a movement, we have decided to influence the decision-making process in this country with the new mode of thinking. The basis for the new mode of thinking is that we are one; therefore, war is obsolete as a means of resolving conflict.

Our first challenge is to build resolve in this nation to move beyond war. Creating opportunities for dialogue will help meet this challenge. The first step is for as many people as possible to participate in formulating the questions that must be asked and answered to ensure our survival. Letter writing and letter writing workshops are one way to involve friends, relatives, editors of newspapers and magazines, and elected officials in a national discussion over critical issues.

This Letter Writing Guideline Kit is divided into two sections: Section I, entitled "Facilitator's Guide," includes an explanation of the facilitator's role and describes how to prepare to lead a workshop. Also included in this section are two different discussion formats. Each format includes a goal statement, list of suggested materials, guidelines for beginning the workshop, discussion questions and a closing.

Section II, entitled "Resource Materials," is comprised of information you should duplicate for the participants in your workshop, such as letter writing guidelines, sample letter, a news article from The Oregonian and national address and telephone lists. In addition, you are encouraged to compile a list of names and addresses of local newspapers, TV and radio stations and governmental officials for the participants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
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FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Facilitator's Role	1
Workshop Preparation	1
Workshop Guidelines	2
Option I	2
Option II	4

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Your Letters and Phone Calls Have Impact	6
Letter Writing Guidelines	7
Sample Letter	9
News Article from <u>The Oregonian</u>	10
National Address List	11
National Telephone List	13

I. FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

A. Facilitator's Role

The facilitator's role is to help stimulate dialogue on current topics in terms of the new mode of thinking about war. Facilitators should encourage people to reach their own conclusions and write whatever they wish.

Because Beyond War is a non-profit educational foundation, we must adhere to certain legal guidelines. The two guidelines shown below should be adhered to when leading this workshop:

- A position or an opinion should not be set forth on behalf of Beyond War.
- The workshop facilitator should not advocate a particular position on an issue.

B. Workshop Preparation

- Compile a list of the names and addresses of local newspapers, TV and radio stations and governmental officials for the participants.
- Prior to the workshop, duplicate the following materials in Section II: Letter Writing Guidelines, Sample Letter, News Article from The Oregonian, National Address Lists and National Telephone List. Reproduce enough copies to give one to each participant.
- Have participants bring their own stationery, stamps, pens and envelopes. Personalized stationery may be used. Have extra writing supplies on hand. Do not use Beyond War memo pads or letterhead.
- Encourage participants to bring news articles and/or editorials on current events to discuss during the workshop.
- As workshop facilitator, you may wish to call your local paper and ask about their "Letters to the Editor" writing policy.

C. Workshop Guidelines

These guidelines include two different approaches that may be used to present the Letter Writing Workshop. Both options have been used successfully in a variety of field situations. It is suggested that you read through each of the optional formats and choose the one that is most congenial to you.

1. OPTION I

Goal of Workshop

The goal of this workshop is to help implement one facet of the Beyond War strategy: to affect the decision-making process in this country with the new mode of thinking by 1988. To do this, many people must become involved in a national discussion over the critical issues that need to be addressed to ensure our survival. This workshop is meant to encourage people to participate in the decision-making process, to increase their understanding of the new mode of thinking and to learn how to communicate it.

Suggested Materials

- Your Letters and Phone Calls Have Impact
- Letter Writing Guidelines
- Sample Letter
- News Article from The Oregonian
- National Address List
- National Telephone List
- Local Address and Telephone List (compiled by facilitator)

Welcome and Introductions

Welcome participants. Introduce yourself as the facilitator. Make a brief statement which describes the goal and purpose of the workshop. It is helpful to use the section of this booklet entitled "Your Letters and Phone Calls Have Impact."

Have the people introduce themselves by giving their name, where they are from, their job, family, etc. and any prior experience they may have had with letter writing. Facilitators can begin the introductions.

Group Discussion

Hand out and review "Letter Writing Guidelines" and "Sample Letter."

Pick a current event to discuss and use the questions below to describe and evaluate the situation:

1. What are the frames of reference of the person(s) involved?
What is the root cause of the conflict?
2. What would be the outcome of holding each point of view?
Risks? Benefits?
3. What interests or goals do the participants in the conflict
have in common?

Make a transition into the discussion by communicating why these questions are relevant.

The questions above were selected for the following reasons:

- To delineate frames of reference that include different points of view (question #1)
- To explore the outcome of the points of view represented and to evaluate them (question #2)
- To understand the principle of we are one (question #3).

To focus the discussion, have one of the participants write the the responses to questions 1 and 2 on a chart.

After the discussion, have people choose a subject about which to write.

Allow one hour for letter writing.

Have each individual read his or her letter to another member of the group for editorial assistance.

Close

Remind people to mail their letter.

Encourage each participant to schedule an Introductory Presentation Video to be followed by a Letter Writing Workshop in their home.

Encourage each participant to write letters regularly.

2. OPTION II

Goal of Workshop

The goal of this workshop is to help implement one facet of the Beyond War strategy: to affect the decision-making process in this country with the new mode of thinking by 1988. To do this, many people must become involved in a national discussion about the critical issues that need to be addressed to ensure our survival. This workshop is meant to encourage people to become involved in the decision-making process, to increase their understanding of the new mode of thinking and to learn how to communicate it.

Suggested Materials

- Your Letters and Phone Calls have Impact
- Letter Writing Guidelines
- Sample Letter
- News Article from The Oregonian
- National Address List
- National Telephone Numbers
- Local Address and Telephone List (compiled by facilitator)

Welcome and Introductions

Welcome participants. Introduce yourself as facilitator. Give a brief statement which describes the goal and purpose of the workshop. It is helpful to use the section of this booklet entitled "Your Letters and Phone Calls Have Impact."

Have the people introduce themselves by giving their name, where they are from, their job, family, etc. and any prior experience they may have had with letter writing. Facilitators can begin the introductions.

Group Discussion

Hand out a number of published letters from newspapers or magazines about local, national and global issues. Ask:

1. What is your response to the letters? Why?
2. Did the letter hold your interest? Why? Why not?
3. Did you learn anything new from reading the letter?
Were you influenced to change your mind? Why? Why not?

Hand out and read through the "Letter Writing Guidelines" and the "Sample Letter." Brainstorm possible subjects for letters and have each person choose a subject about which to write.

To help formulate their letter, have people consider the following questions. The questions can be written on a chart or copies can be made to hand out to the participants.

1. What are your concerns or opinions about the subject that you chose?
2. What prompted your concerns?
3. What is the outcome if the situation *isn't* changed?
4. What do you want to communicate to the reader?
5. What are the facts?
6. What alternatives do you propose?

Allow one hour for letter writing.

Divide into small groups of three or four and have each person read his or her letter to the group for editorial assistance.

Close

Remind people to mail their letter.

Encourage each participant to schedule an Introductory Presentation Video to be followed by a Letter Writing Workshop in their home.

Encourage each participant to write letters regularly.

II. RESOURCE MATERIALS

A. Your Letters and Phone Calls Have Impact

"I've seen it happen. I have seen letters come home in the briefcase and appear in speeches on the Senate floor the next morning."

Betty Bumpers, Founder of Peace Links,
wife of Senator Dale Bumpers, D-Arkansas

"Members of the Congress positively do read their mail. The mood and tenor of the daily mail from home is a recurring topic of conversation in the rear of the House and Senate Chambers or around the coffee cups in the dining rooms of the Capitol."

House Majority Leader Jim Wright, Texas

"Public officials are very sensitive to what their constituency are feeling and thinking. They often base their votes on public opinion."

Defense Public Information, The Pentagon

"Letters and phone calls carry equal weight when controversial legislation is pending."

Office of Ed Zschau, U.S. Congressman (CA)

"A powerful letter, given wide circulation, can change governmental and individual behavior."

Editorial Page Editor, The Oregonian

"One letter to the editor in The Los Angeles Times is worth \$3000 in advertising space."

Los Angeles Advertising Executive

"Only 5% of the Congress is educated on any one issue."

Former National Security Staff Member, White House

"Facts and articles included with your letter may spawn further research on the subject which will in turn be presented to your elected official."

Office of Tom Lantos, U.S. Congressman (CA)

"The first reports of public opinion to the President are from the White House Comments Desk."

White House Comments Desk

B. Letter Writing Guidelines

Make it easy for your readers to agree:

Avoid unnecessary hurdles. Here are some typical barriers which often make readers wander to the comics or the sports page:

Righteous indignation: "I am stunned. . ." "It is shocking. . ." "My belief in this country is shattered. . ." Words that draw the reader to think about you, rather than the principle or the facts, are distracting.

Big words, obscure words, long sentences, puns and overstatements: "The President's pusillanimous advisors. . ."

Stay away from personal evaluations: "The Governor must not be smart. . ." can alienate those who might otherwise agree with you.

Avoid the we/they dynamic: "You have surrounded yourself with hawks. . ." excludes a group of people. "Let's rise to this challenge together. . ." is objective and inclusive.

Facts are more persuasive than opinions: "Recent reports from the Joint Chiefs of Staff reveal. . ." works better than "I think it is obvious that we are bombing Libya because. . ."

Make your letter effective:

Be timely. Write when an issue is in the news or when legislation is pending.

Focus on one point or issue. State the central idea of your letter at the beginning.

Choose a subject about which you are personally motivated.

Write as an individual, not as a spokesperson for Beyond War.

Use fresh language. Avoid jargon.

Make your letter easy to read:

Type or handwrite legibly.

Make it clear and concise.

Keep it short; between 150 and 200 words is best.

Suggested ways to leverage your influence:

Send your letter to more than one person.

Enclose relevant articles.

Follow up on replies you receive.

SAMPLE LETTER

Date
Your address
Your phone

The Honorable John Doe
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Doe,

or

Ms. Jane Smith
Editorial Page Editor
The Anytown Times
Address

Dear Editor,

- State your main point or opinion in the first sentence.
- Write about your personal concerns and views. Use facts to show you are informed.
- If appropriate, state a specific bill number, ask for a specific action and request a reply to your letter.
- Close with a strong statement.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Letter writers can improve chances of publication by knowing criteria

By ROBERT LANDAUER

Editorial Page Editor, The Oregonian

February 26, 1986

HOW CAN WRITERS of letters to the editor improve the odds that their work will be published? What stumbling blocks most often trip up such writers?

Readers frequently ask The Oregonian's editors these and similar questions. They deserve answers because:

Editors' note

1. The letters are important to the newspaper. They serve as a useful, independent check on the quality of our news coverage, columns and editorials.

2. More important, they are valued by readers as a provocative, entertaining way for the person who doesn't own his own printing press to pour his thoughts and ideas into the currents of public debate.

What follows are observations and tips from the editors and from Jill Riebesehl, editorial researcher, who reads all of the letters:

- Each letter to the editor is approached positively. The attitude is, "How do we say 'yes' to this letter?"

- All letters must be signed. Good letters often are not printed because the writers have failed to sign them.

- Letters must include an address. Where street addresses have been assigned, they must be included. Post office box numbers do not suffice in such cases.

- Letters that request that the writer's name or address be withheld will not be printed.

- Aliases are unacceptable.

- Telephone numbers should be included for verification purposes. Letters frequently are discarded because a telephone number has not been included and because other, good letters are available the authenticity of which can be verified more quickly.

- The shorter the letter, the better its chances of being published. We want to let as many people as possible voice their opinions.

- Very few letters that exceed 250 words are published. Occasional exceptions are made for well-researched, detailed, clear letters on subjects of major public import or interest. Longer letters sometimes are converted into "In my opinion" articles for the Forum pages.

- The Oregonian edits letters for brevity, clarity, grammar and punctuation. Only a few letters require no editing. Therefore, letters that contain a request that they not be edited rarely are printed.

- The volume of mail prohibits consultation with writers after editing and before printing. The letters of writers who request such consultation are bypassed.

- The Oregonian prefers to publish letters composed specifically for this newspaper. We try not to print letters that have appeared in or have been mailed to other publications. When writers are discovered to engage in mass mailings, we routinely reject their letters.

- In line with the above, letters should be original versions. Carbon copies and photocopies usually are rejected.

- Typed, double-spaced letters are appreciated because they are easy to edit. However, not everyone has access to a typewriter. Many handwritten letters are selected for publication. However, if the writing is illegible, we spend very little time trying to decode it.

- Publication preference is given to readers who do not have easy access to the news columns. Public officials may be given an opportunity to reply to a news story or editorial that deals with them; however, their letters usually are sent to the news department to be judged as news releases.

- Experience shows that letters larded with irony and satire are widely misunderstood. There is no iron rule against using them, but few of them are printed in The Oregonian or other large metropolitan dailies.

- Poetry is rarely printed.

- Letters with arguments built solely by citing scripture are seldom used.

- To promote a diversity of comment, writers are generally limited to four letters a year. Letter volume decreases substantially the week between Christmas and New Year and the week before Labor Day, so "bonus" letters are allowed in those periods and not counted against the total. We keep the names of some 70 frequent letter writers in a computer file and maintain a running tally of their contributions.

- Some writers have expressed fears that they are unable to meet the standards of grammar and punctuation seen in most letters. That should not stop anyone from writing. If the idea or information presented has value, we edit it so that problems of grammar and punctuation do not interfere with presentation of the message.

- Letters to the editor can appear elsewhere than on the editorial page. Letters also can appear twice a week, along with editorials, in each of The Oregonian's suburban zoned editions. Letters dealing largely or exclusively with issues in Clark County, east Multnomah County, Washington County and Clackamas County are routinely placed in those editions. Indeed, these editions are capable of handling more letters than they now receive. Letters also appear on Sundays in the Sports and Travel sections and in Northwest Magazine.

- Letters that express views that differ with those of the newspaper's editorials have a much greater chance of publication than those that simply endorse the view already stated.

- Letter-writing campaigns, particularly in support of a political candidate or cause or as part of a school project, are easy to spot. Very few of such letters are printed. No letters are printed when students indicate they will be given a higher grade if a letter is published. We question the ethics of that approach as a teaching device.

- Testimonial letters for politicians during election campaigns may be printed if they illuminate an issue or idea relevant to the campaign. Most simply reproduce data available in the Oregon Voters' Pamphlet and are filed.

- Extra space is regularly allotted to letters as the campaign season heats up. The political letters that have the best chance of getting in deal with one subject in a clear, concise and critical manner and don't indulge in name-calling.

- Many letters often are received on the same subject. Usually, one or two that make the central point most clearly are printed.

- Letters are read and judged on the day they are received, Monday through Friday. They are not stored. Thus, a letter that was turned down one day might have been accepted on another day.

- Each week, I examine the rejected letters for one or two days to see whether any of those should have been accepted. Readers also are free to appeal the editorial researcher's decision directly to me.

- Over the years, some types of letters have had high success in getting published. Typically, the letters reflect direct experience of how public agencies — schools, city and county departments and state and federal offices, for example — deliver services. They present a clear point of view about the service. And they supply case-building — perhaps factors of historical perspective, cost or efficiency — to support the viewpoint.

We know it can be difficult to write a good letter. But we also know that a powerful letter, given wide circulation, can change governmental and individual behavior. It can shape public opinion in this region and in this country. That's why we print them and why we hope you continue to write them.



LANDAUER

C. National Address List

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

President Ronald Reagan
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20500

Mr. George Shultz
Secretary of State
Old Executive Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20506

Mr. Caspar Weinberger
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Mr. Donald T. Regan
Chief of Staff to
the President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. Kenneth Adelman
U.S. Arms Control and
Disarmament Agency
320 21st street NW
Washington, D.C. 20451

Admiral John Poindexter
Assistant to the President
National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. Richard Perle
Assistant Secretary of Defense
National Security Policy
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

U.S. SENATE

Address all Senators:

The Honorable _____
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Senate Office Building
Room 446
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. CONGRESS

Address all Congresspeople:

The Honorable _____
House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2170
Washington, D.C. 2051

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Letter to the Editor
Time
Time & Life Building
Rockefeller Center
New York, NY 10020

Letters Editor
Newsweek
444 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Voices
U.S. News & World Report
2400 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037-1196

Editor
Christian Science Monitor
One Norway Street
Boston, MA 02115

Editor
USA Today
Box 500
Washington, D.C. 20044

NATIONAL TELEVISION

Audience Services
ABC
1330 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019

Audience Services
CBS
51 W. 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

Audience Services
NBC
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

Cable News Network (CNN)
1050 Techwood Drive, N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318

Public Broadcasting Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

D. National Telephone List

Congress-U.S. Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121

Ask for your specific Senator or Congressperson. They receive public opinion updates 2 or 3 times a day, especially on a current issue and when legislation is pending. If your message is urgent, a call to Washington is more effective. U. S. Senators and Congressman also have local offices. Local Congressional aides update our elected officials in Washington with a tally and comments at the end of each day.

Local Elected Officials: (800) 345-VOTE

The National Registrar of Voters office can direct you to a phone number that will have addresses and phone numbers of all your local officials. You can also check the "U.S. Government" listing in your phone book. Your local elected officials receive public opinion tallies and comments at the end of each day.

White House Comments Desk: (202) 456-7639

The comments are sent to the Chief of Staff where they are compiled and sent to the President. The President receives public opinion updates 2 or 3 times a day when an issue is controversial. After Presidential speeches, the Comments Desk stays open until 11:00 p.m. EST. Normal hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. EST.

Department of Defense: (202) 697-5737 or (202) 695-2065

The opinions are consolidated and sent to the Secretary of Defense monthly, more often if it is deemed necessary.

Special Public Opinion Message: (800) 325-6000

This is a special service of Western Union. Ask for "Special Public Opinion Message". Western Union has all necessary Congressional and Statehouse addresses. Current cost (as of 4/24/86) is \$4.25 for 20 words or less charged to your phone. Your message is delivered within hours.

Nuclear Arms Control Hotline: (202) 543-0006

Call this number to find out which issues are being voted on in Congress during the current week.

National Television Networks that accept phone comments*

Audience Services
NBC Network
(212) 664-2334

Cable Network News
CNN
(404) 827-1500

Audience Services
CBS Network
(212) 975-324

*Letters only to ABC and PBS

