

This guide is a collaboration between [RESULTS UK](#) and the [Craftivist Collective](#). It can be used by campaigners to help think differently about letter writing as a campaign action, and works as a practical guide on how to do letter-writing with a twist. We know that many MPs in the UK have been hard to get hold of during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we think that really personal messages are especially important given the challenging circumstances.

If you'd like to have a go, you can choose one of the international development [campaign issues we are working on](#) and combine with the following tips to bring your letter to life. Before sending your letter, check that your chosen recipient is currently able to receive hand-written letters. If not, consider applying these tips to an email instead.

What is the Craftivist Collective?

We offer an opportunity to engage in Gentle Protest. This is our unique methodology that uses craftivism - a combination of craft and activism - as a tool to help create long-lasting change. To us 'Gentle Protest' represents a beautiful, fair and kind form of activism that's aimed at creating a happier, healthier and more harmonious world.

We use our minds to visualise a positive world, our hands to craft beauty that brings injustices to light, and our hearts to build bridges and critical friendships with influential decision makers. We're proud to tell you that our work has helped to change hearts, minds, policies and laws around the world.

Join us in harnessing the power of craft for positive change.

Crafting Letters for Gentle Protest

The Power of Letters

Do you remember the last letter you received? Not a boring bill or bank statement, but an actual real life, handwritten letter. From a real person. In pen and ink. If you're anything like me, the likelihood is you can. Because in a world awash with emails, texts and Whatsapp messages, they're scarce, which also means they're often treasured.

It's the time and care that goes into a letter, and the sincerity of the gesture, that can make it so special. Seeing the senders' handwriting on a page - rather than a stock font - can be a startling reminder of just how wonderfully unique we all are. The feel of the paper, the smell of the ink, it's a sensory experience that lays the groundwork for more genuine connections. Whether writing or reading a letter it's nearly always done in a private moment. So the words sink in at their own pace. As a result, there's a level of intimacy to letter writing that few other forms of correspondence can lay claim on.

Letters as Intimate Activism

Therefore, when it comes to building connections and bridges with political power-holders the personal approach of a hand written, well-crafted letter can be powerful. I'm definitely not talking about the strongly-worded kind. Quite the opposite. I'm talking about letters that show an understanding of social change issues as well as the feelings and emotions of the recipient. Intimate, respectful gestures crafted to provoke thought and hopefully action. It's a form of intimate activism.

The beauty of writing a letter is that it can be a slow, thoughtful process. By creating a safe and quiet space for yourself to write in you'll feel less inclined to rush and better prepared to embrace the opportunity for careful contemplation. Away from the bright blue light of a computer screen you can set up a soothing environment, free of distractions in which you can craft something special. You're also less likely to be reactive when writing a physical letter. Committing your thoughts down in permanent ink will hopefully make you think even more carefully about what it is you're saying, and who you're saying it to.

I thought I would share a few tips that I like to keep front of mind when crafting gentle protest letters myself:

Be part of positive change.

Your belief, your thought, your tone, it can inspire and influence your reader. Consider how you'd like the power-holder you're addressing to *feel* when they read your letter. What would move them to reflect on the issues you've raised and be open to the solutions you are offering? What would help them imagine how they can be part of addressing the injustices? Each letter is a chance to inspire, encourage and build a bridge as critical friends rather than aggressive enemies. Represent your cause with compassion, conviction and care and your words will find a captive audience.

Be the tortoise.

And by this we mean, s - l - o - w down. When we feel angry or upset by injustices our reaction is often to rush in and attempt to right them. Yet there's rarely a quick easy fix. Take your time to reflect on the complexities of the issue, find realistic solutions the reader can be part of implementing, and be mindful of the differing views the reader might have. All of this helps develop a sounder strategic approach, resulting in your letter standing a stronger chance influencing decision-makers. Be clear in your protest but gentle in your delivery. We need to be determined, patient and persistent - like the tortoise - to work carefully towards our goal.

Be the giraffe.

Did you know that the giraffe has the biggest heart of any land animal? It has to have power to pump blood all the way up it's long neck to the brain! We need a tender heart to write a protest letter in a way that connects with the reader with compassion rather than causing conflict. An open heart steers us towards empathy, away from judgment, anchors us in hope not pessimism and helps us encourage the best in people not fuel the worst. By channelling your inner giraffe you can thread your loving values through your gentle protest letter and craft your message to expand your readers heart to see that they can use their power for loving change.

Beware the Jackal.

Because it's a far less charming proposition. Unlike our gentle giant, the giraffe, or our slow, determined friend, the tortoise, the jackal is quick to anger. It snaps and reacts to what's right in front of it without thought. Erratic rather than strategic. Aggressive rather than proactive. Fixated on the problem that fuels its fear and fight-or-flight response, it is incapable of working towards positive solutions. Therefore, you can just imagine how being the jackal might affect the outcome of your letter. Non-violent communication mitigates the risk of defensiveness from the decision-maker. If they don't feel demonised they're less likely to be closed off to the important solutions your message proposes. By filling our letters with compassionate correspondence the reader is more likely to want to feel part of the solutions.

Making it memorable.

From the colour of the paper to the hand-writing style and content, it's good to view every aspect of your letter as a representation of your message. When it all works beautifully together it shows real thought, consideration and craft has been applied. The power is in the detail: Us humans all crave to feel seen, heard and valued as the unique individuals we are - you can connect to this need by crafting a beautiful bespoke letter for your letter-receiver to feel seen and valued. It makes it feel like an extra special gift for the reader and adds poignancy to the message you are working in service of. Let your caring voice shine through as a conduit for positive change in our fragile world. The compassion and conviction you show is more likely to linger in the reader's heart and mind and make it harder to dismiss.

Creating a safe, comfortable space.

There's always a balance to strike when writing a letter. Getting the structure, grammar, tone, and presentation right, requires care and craft. Before you sit down to write, it's a good idea to create an environment that helps with deep contemplative thought. Set a relaxing scene that soothes your senses. Some small comforts.

Background music - perhaps our Crafterthought playlist you can find on Spotify - relaxing fragrances, candles or just a cup of your favourite tea or coffee can be a great way of setting up a comfortable space in which to work. We recommend starting by writing the envelope first - this helps you visualise the reader.

Crafting your message

A compassionate note from the heart is the perfect gift for a power holder who may carry the weight of great responsibility on their shoulders. Showing empathy by treading softly but purposefully in your letter will help you stand out amongst the correspondence they are used to dealing with. Think carefully about structure; sensitively about phrasing; diligently about grammar and spelling. By giving your message clarity and accuracy you'll instil credibility.

"The best letters should resemble, not shouting in a theatre but whispering in a corner with a friend." - John O'Connell

A few top tips:

1. **Be respectful.** Address your chosen power-holder by their title, unless you're already on first name terms, of course.
2. **Be supportive.** Use the language of a positive solution seeker. Words such as 'could', 'encourage', 'invite' 'suggest'. Avoid judgemental language such as 'should', 'ought', 'must', 'but', 'so'.
3. **Be future focused.** Don't get stuck in the past when it comes to the decision-maker's previous actions. Encourage them to be inspiring change-makers for the future.
4. **Avoid absolutes.** Words like 'always', 'never'. They can feel reductive and judgemental rather than considerate and inspiring.
5. **Get descriptive.** Words are a beautiful thing. Use them to help paint the picture of the new normal your decision-maker can help create.
6. **Be optimistic.** It'll give your letter an inspiringly positive tone. Encourage your decision-maker to "imagine if", to "picture...", to think "wouldn't it be wonderful if".

7. **Finish with a flourish.** Rather than plain old, “*Yours sincerely*” sign off with something that’s a stronger fit with the sentiment of your letter e.g. ‘*yours in hope*’ and don’t forget to put your contact details for them to reply.

Delivery is all in the timing

Decision-makers are likely to be busy people. It’s worth thinking about how to make sure your letter lands in their hands at the right moment - a time when they might be able to invest as much care in reading it as you did in writing it. For example, if it’s a government official, perhaps parliamentary recess might present a good opportunity. Or, if it’s a local councillor, it might be worth steering clear of local election campaign timescales. Being considerate of this when planning your letter will help strengthen the chance of forming a genuine connection.

Check out the [RESULTS UK campaigns page](#) for help with choosing the most timely and impactful international development campaign ‘ask’. Before sending your letter, check that your chosen recipient is currently able to receive hand-written letters. If not, consider applying these tips to an email instead.

Keep in touch : Come share your letter, thoughts, experience on social media with @Craftivists ([Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)), [@CraftivistCollective](#) on Facebook or email me on sarah@craftivist-collective.com with your feedback.

For more information on how to craft the most effective gentle protest letter head over to:

1. <http://nonviolentcommunication.com>
2. <http://www.restorativepracticeslimerick.ie/what-is-restorative-practices.html>
3. Why Fonts Matter by Sarah Hyndman
4. Letters of Note by Shaun Usher
5. More Letters of Note edited by Shaun Usher Unbound
6. Letters to Change The World by Travis Elborough
7. To the Letter: A Journey Through a Vanishing World by Simon Garfield
8. The Art Of The Handwritten Note by Margaret Shepherd
9. Written in History by Simon Sebag Montefiore

Gentle Protest Letter Examples for Inspiration

Example A: Make hope possible not despair convincing
[Wind the clock by E.B.White to Mr Nadeu 1973](#)

If you are writing a letter to a power holder who you believe has slipped into apathy or promotes fear; White's letter might help you see how you can frame your letter to make hope possible, not despair convincing. Author E. B. White, born 1899 is one of the most celebrated essayist of his time and is known for his children's books including 'Charlotte's Web'. He also wrote hundreds of letters. The letter below was written as a reply to a Mr. Nadeau, who asked White's opinion on what he saw as a bleak future for the human race.

North Brooklin, Maine
30 March 1973

Dear Mr. Nadeau:

As long as there is one upright man, as long as there is one compassionate woman, the contagion may spread and the scene is not desolate. Hope is the thing that is left to us, in a bad time. I shall get up Sunday morning and wind the clock, as a contribution to order and steadfastness.

Sailors have an expression about the weather: they say, the weather is a great bluffer. I guess the same is true of our human society—things can look dark, then a break shows in the clouds, and all is changed, sometimes rather suddenly. It is quite obvious that the human race has made a queer mess of life on this planet. But as a people we probably harbor seeds of goodness that have lain for a long time waiting to sprout when the conditions are right. Man's curiosity, his relentlessness, his inventiveness, his ingenuity have led him into deep trouble. We can only hope that these same traits will enable him to claw his way out.

Hang on to your hat. Hang on to your hope. And wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day.

Sincerely,
[Signed, 'E. B. White']

Example B: Be a critical friend not aggressive enemy:

You are not so kind as you used to be - Clementine Churchill to Winston Churchill

If you have been in correspondence with a powerholder a few times and you have a respectful relationship with them, then this letter can be very useful to see how you can serve constructive criticism to someone in a palatable way where they listen and can act urgently. Clementine, the devoted wife of Winston Churchill wrote many letters to her husband even when they were in the same home! A few months after he first became Prime Minister and was at the early stages of WWI Churchill's stress was noticed and felt behind closed doors by those who worked for him. Clementine wrote him the below letter lovingly and respectfully encouraging Churchill to be kinder to his staff. Can you use this structure to

help your letter be read with an open heart, open mind and eagerness to change by the person you are writing to?

10 Downing Street, Whitehall, June 27, 1940

My Darling,

I hope you will forgive me if I tell you something that I feel you ought to know.

One of the men in your entourage (a devoted friend) has been to me & told me that there is a danger of your being generally disliked by your colleagues and subordinates because of your rough sarcastic & overbearing manner — It seems your Private Secretaries have agreed to behave like school boys & ‘take what’s coming to them’ & then escape out of your presence shrugging their shoulders — Higher up, if an idea is suggested (say at a conference) you are supposed to be so contemptuous that presently no ideas, good or bad, will be forthcoming. I was astonished & upset because in all these years I have been accustomed to all those who have worked with & under you, loving you — I said this & I was told ‘No doubt it’s the strain’ —

My Darling Winston — I must confess that I have noticed a deterioration in your manner; & you are not so kind as you used to be.

It is for you to give the Orders & if they are bungled — except for the King, the Archbishop of Canterbury & the Speaker, you can sack anyone & everyone — Therefore with this terrific power you must combine urbanity, kindness and if possible Olympic calm. You used to quote:— ‘On ne règne sur les âmes que par le calme’¹ — I cannot bear that those who serve the Country and yourself should not love as well as admire and respect you — Besides you won’t get the best results by irascibility & rudeness. They will breed either dislike or a slave mentality — (Rebellion in War time being out of the question!)

Please forgive your loving devoted & watchful Clemie

P.S. I wrote this at Chequers last Sunday, tore it up, but here it is now.

Example C: Explain your protest, reasoning & preempt their negative response:

Martin Luther King Jr’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’ 1963

This famous letter was a response to a group of eight white local clergymen who publicly condemned King’s actions to breach the injunction by city authorities of Birmingham to demonstrate civil rights, published in the Birmingham News. The result was one of the most important written documents of the civil rights era. You can find the letter online. It’s a long one. Here are some highlights I hope you find useful for your own writing:

- Starting with ‘My Dear Fellow Clergymen’ King shows his respect to his colleagues.

¹ Roughly translates as: “One can reign over hearts only by keeping one’s composure.”

- Writing calmly *“But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and your criticism are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.”* He goes on to quote their own words back to them to address them in his argument.
- Throughout the letter he sprinkles biblical references to remind them of their common mission as clergymen. He goes on to explain in detail his strategy for why he was willing to be imprisoned: *“In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps...”*
- He sets the scene and his thought process: *“But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.”* With a context of being a *“victim of broken promise”* so there was *“no alternative except that of preparing direct action.”*
- King regularly quotes the clergymen’s own words back to them to remind the reader he is trying to answer their concerns, be of service to them and he is not ego-driven. For example: *“You may well ask, “why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches etc? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action”.*
- He pulls at the reader’s heartstrings with *“when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking the agonizing pathos: “Daddy, why do white people treat coloured people so mean?”* asking for empathy from the reader without trying to cause guilt, shame or manipulation.
- He acknowledges their concerns *“You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern.”* And then brings in his belief: *“I would agree with St Augustine that ‘An unjust law is no law at all.’”*
- His criticism of the white clergy is not demonising or hateful. King’s letter shows his sadness and vulnerable honesty: *“I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate.”*
- King’s Positive, hopeful and empowering ending reminding the clergy readers of their equality, common values and humanity: *“I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader, but as a fellow clergymen and a Christian brother... Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood.”*

More well-crafted letters you can find online:

1. [Bill Bernach to the Owners of Grey's Advertisingof Grey's Advertising](#) - Bill's worry and a gentle warning on the risky future the company is heading towards.
2. [To My Old Master](#) - Jourdon Anderson to Patrick Henry Anderson 1865 challenging his old slave-master with honesty, dignity and grace.
3. [Do](#) - Sol Lewitt to Eva Hesse 1965 - no so gentle yet the letter also shows belief in someone which shows a real love for them.
4. [17 Million Negroes Cannot Wait For The Hearts Of Men To Change](#) passionate protest expecting more from people.
5. Jacqueline Keneddy to Nikita Krushchev, 1st December 1963 showing the power of vulnerability, praise for small past actions and empathy.
6. [On Bureaucratese and Gobbledygook](#) - Alfred Kahn to his colleagues. 1977 Solution focused with suggestions.
7. [Gentlemen I Just Don't Belong Here](#) - Ursula Le Guin to John Radziewicz - short, observational and clear stand without cruel words directed at him.
8. [With Great Respect. Marge Simpson](#) - Marge Simpson to Barbara Bush on the cruel words The First Lady said about the Simpsons.