

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL BY LETTER

Sharpen your letter-writing skills with these valuable tips and sound advice on creating formal school correspondence.

Good communication is essential to success in evaluations, development and ongoing monitoring of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans. Experts advise putting all your requests in writing, even if it's not required by your school district.

Benefits of Written Communication

Letters provide both you and the school with a record of ideas, concerns and suggestions. They also give the people involved the opportunity to go over issues and suggestions point by point.

Putting your thoughts on paper gives you the opportunity to take as long as you need to

- state your concerns.
- carefully review what you've written.
- have someone else read the letter and make suggestions.
- make any changes.

Writing letters is a skill, but one that can be learned with attention to detail and practice.

Keep in mind that each letter you write will differ according to the situation, the person to whom you are writing and the issues you are discussing.

What Should I Say in My Letter?

Any business letter should be short and to the point. In other words, keep it simple. Figure out what to say by first asking yourself the following questions:

- Why am I writing?
- What are my specific concerns?
- What are my questions?
- What would I like the person to do about this situation?
- What sort of response do I want — a letter, a meeting, a phone call or something else?

Include the following basic information:

- the date of your letter
- your child's full name and homeroom teacher's name
- what you want (rather than what you don't want)
- your email or street address (depending on how you want to receive a response)
- daytime phone number where you can be reached during school hours
- a "thank you" at the end

What Are Other Tips to Keep in Mind?

You want to make a good impression so that the person reading your letter will understand your request and say “yes.” Remember, this person may not know you, your child or your child’s situation. Keep the tone of your letter pleasant and businesslike. Give the facts without letting anger, frustration, blame or other negative emotions creep in.

More Letter Writing Tips

After you write your first draft, put it aside for a day or two. Read your letter as though you are the person receiving it. After looking at it with fresh eyes, you may find some revisions are needed.

Here are some points to review:

- Is the tone appropriate and businesslike?
- Have you included the important facts?
- Is your request clear?
- Have you kept it simple, or does your letter ramble on and on?
- Have you used spell-check and grammar-check, if writing on the computer

It’s always a good idea to have someone else read your letter. Can the reader tell what you are asking for? Would the reader say “yes” if he or she received this letter? Ask the reader to look for typos and errors, and to suggest ways to improve the letter.

Keep Good Records

- Always keep a copy of each letter or email you send as well as those you receive. It’s useful to have a paper folder to store copies of letters and email printouts.

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