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Public Speaking Speech 3 – The Process/Demonstration Speech

### *Task*

Prepare a 3 to 8 minute speech demonstrating how to do something. Teach the audience the essential steps to complete a task. Visual aids should be used for this speech! The speech should flow smoothly from start to finish, steps should go in chronological order, and the conclusion should include a brief summarizing statement.

### *Full-Sentence Outline of the Speech*

- I. Ask the audience members about their experience with writing letters.
  - A. How many of them feel strongly about an issue.
  - B. How many of them have written a letter to a decision-maker.
- II. Explain why letters do make a difference.
  - A. Members of Congress generally keep tallies of them to gauge public opinion.
- III. Ask the audience which method of communication—letters, phone calls, faxes, or emails—is most effective.
- IV. Explain guidelines for letter writing:
  - A. Avoid form letters.
  - B. Identify the issue first.
  - C. Write about only one issue.
  - D. Be personal and stay polite.
- V. Pass out sample letters of response and information sheets at the end.

### *The Speech*

How many of you feel strongly about a political or social issue, whether it's poverty or animal welfare, abortion or the death penalty?

*See hands.* How many of you have written a letter to any type of decision-maker about such an issue? *See hands.* Hopefully, my presentation will give you some tips and suggestions for how to write this type of letter and how to do so effectively.

Some of you might be thinking that letters to policymakers are useless, that politicians really don't care about what constituents tell them. In fact, however, many decision-makers do listen: most members of Congress keep tallies of the number of letters they receive on a certain issue and use those tallies to gauge public opinion. I have heard experienced lobbyists say that letters can make an enormous difference—if, that is, they are done effectively.

One way to ensure that communications are effective is to send them in the form that Congressional staff workers pay most attention to. *Write the following four things on the board:* <sup>1)</sup> *handwritten or typed letters* <sup>2)</sup> *emails* <sup>3)</sup> *faxes* <sup>4)</sup> *phone calls*. Can anyone guess which of these four methods of communication would probably be most effective? *Call on people until someone guesses* <sup>1)</sup> *handwritten or typed letters*. Does anyone have a guess about the second most effective method? *Call on people until someone guesses* <sup>4)</sup> *phone calls*. How about the third most effective method? *The answer is* <sup>3)</sup> *faxes*. And the least effective method, then, is email. This is the general hierarchy of significance in the minds of those who read the letters sent to politicians.

While mailed letters are usually most powerful, they are not always feasible. Because of the 2001 anthrax attacks, all Congressional letters undergo decontamination. This delays the delivery of regular mail to either Congress or the White House by up to a month. If your issue is not urgent, it is definitely best to send a handwritten or typed letter; if the message needs to get through in less than a month, however, you should send a fax or call the office instead.

While it is obviously essential to make sure that your letter is received on time, the content of your letter is also important. *Write “1. avoid form letters” on the board.* You should always stay away from sending form letters; an obviously personal letter will be given substantially more weight. *Write “3. Identify the issue first” on the board.* In the first sentence of your letter, summarize the action that you want the policymaker to take. If it applies, give the number, title, and original sponsor of the legislation so that it can be easily identified without confusion. For example, you might say this as your first sentence: “I strongly support H.R. 2691, the Income Equity Act introduced by Rep. Martin Sabo, as it would be an effective first step towards attenuating the inequity between CEO pay and income for average workers.” *Write “4. Stick to one issue” on the board.* Don’t try to request more than one action at once; your letter will have the greatest impact if you focus on one particular issue.

Can anyone think of other content guidelines for a business letter like this? *Call on people, write down good suggestions, and explain why any bad suggestions shouldn't be taken. If no one gets these, write these on the board as well: "7. Stay polite"* Especially when writing to a decision-maker unlikely to support your own position, be assertive but always remain courteous. Your message will be strongest if you appear confident, informed, and rational. A nasty or threatening letter may actually hurt your cause, not help it. *"8. Be personal"* If possible, try to focus on how the issue affects you or others you know. Maybe include a short anecdote or an explanation of how much the issue means to you personally. Not only will this create an emotional connection with the reader, but it will also prevent the appearance of a form letter.

After you have sent your letter, it may take a few weeks or even months, but eventually, the decision-maker should write back to you. *Hand around the three sample response letters.* Here are three of the many responses I have received; you can pass them around.

Of course, letters are not—and should not be—the only way you express your views. Political participation can also take the form of a letter to the editor or an awareness campaign or a protest. But letters are one important way to have a voice in shaping the policies that affect us all. Whether you support extending the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act or oppose it, whether you favor the Patriot Act or would like to see it repealed, it is essential that you make your voice heard in one way or

another, for, as Ralph Nader is fond of saying, “The only place where democracy comes before work is in the dictionary.”

*Pass out the sheet of information to each student and the teacher.* This is a sheet that contains the information on how to write an effective letter that I just described. It also has the current contact information for some of the federal and state representatives in our area. You can keep it with you and use it whenever you feel motivated to write a letter about an issue important to you.