

The Seven Steps for E-mailing Your Legislator

E-mail has changed the way that we communicate and in many ways has replaced other forms of communication, such as phone calls or handwritten letters. This technological tool is fast, cheap, and efficient. *However, because it is a fast and relatively informal means of communication, many legislators view it as less credible than other methods.* If you use email to communicate with your legislator, you should do so in the context of an ongoing relationship in which you use other methods as the foundation of your communication.

To craft an e-mail with impact, follow these steps:

1. **In the subject line of the message, state that you are a constituent** (For example—*Subject: Message from a constituent on xyz issue*). Most legislators have their staff sort and respond to their e-mail, and this strategy will increase the likelihood that your letter is read.
2. **State your request concisely.** View your message as different from an electronic letter. Again, e-mail is less formal and much more brief than traditional written communication. Craft your message accordingly—keep it tight and short.
3. **Provide personal examples and local context.** Use similar principles as those in letter-writing, but in a tighter format. If you are sending a generic e-mail written by a group of which you're a part, insert personal examples in the message.
4. **Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to send an e-mail as well.** Again, quantity is critical. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue. One e-mail is not convincing.
5. **Report your e-mail.** If the e-mail is initiated by an organization, ask if they want you to report your e-mail. Some groups can monitor responses electronically without your having to report, but most want you to let them know. If you persuaded a friend, let them know that that friend will be reporting as well. Make sure that your friend follows through.
6. **Follow up.** Again, because the impact of e-mail varies widely from legislator to legislator, be sure that you are using other methods to communicate with your legislator. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, handwritten letter, or visit.
7. **Communicate more than once.** As with all other forms of communicating with your legislator, view your e-mail as part of an ongoing relationship. Keep in touch and tuned into your legislator and his or her position on the issue.