



The Art of Writing Letters

You write letters to request information, request action, provide information or describe an event, decline a request, and express appreciation.

In this article, you will learn about two approaches to letter writing, the **Blame Approach** and the **Story-Telling Approach**. You will learn the difference between business letters and therapeutic letters - and why you should **never send therapeutic letters to the school**.

Because you want your letters to create a good first impression, read our companion article, **12 Rules for Writing Great Letters**.

We strongly recommend that you read the **original Letter to the Stranger** by Pete Wright and Janie Bowman. You will meet the panicked parents who wrote an angry letter to the school. After a cooling-off period, the parents wrote a very different letter. The original **Letter to the Stranger** teaches you how strong emotions affect people -- especially parents. You will also meet "the Stranger" and learn how he reacted to these two letters.

Letter Writing and the Need to DO SOMETHING!

When parents fire off a letter to the school, they are usually in the middle of a crisis that involves their child. At that moment, they want to **DO SOMETHING**. They may be trying to right a wrong or protect their child from harm. Sometimes, parents write angry letters after a series of bad experiences or incidents that have occurred over a period months or years.

Before you send a strongly worded letter to the school, it is important for you to keep several things in mind. **First**, after you send a letter to the school, it is out of your hands forever. **You can never change it!**

Second, your letter will be read by strangers. Schools are bureaucracies. In many cases, important decisions will be made by administrators who are a level or two above your contact person. These administrators don't know you or your child. They don't know the "history" behind your letter.

Third, no one will wade through a long letter to a nugget of gold. This means that you have to capture the reader's interest and attention within the first few sentences. If you don't capture the reader's interest quickly, the reader will skim a page or two and put your letter away.

Fourth, your letter is a personal statement about you and your situation. What are you saying about yourself if you give in to the urge to DO SOMETHING and write an angry, threatening, or demanding letter? The decision-making strangers who make decisions in the school bureaucracy don't know or care that this was the last straw or that the letter is the culmination of many negative experiences. A letter gives you an opportunity to make an impression and tell your side of the story. You need to think about the impression you want to make on the stranger. Do you want the stranger to see you as

