



Fairness Toolkit: Writing So You Will Be Heard

When writing a letter of concern or a request letter, ensure that it not only contains relevant information, but more importantly, that such information is laid out in a way that effectively conveys what happened, how it has impacted you and what you are asking for. Aim to get your message across professionally, respectfully and coherently. Here are some tips:

1

Aim for one page and no more than two. You want to keep the reader's attention until the very end. Keep your letter concise, don't repeat things and edit, edit! A long and repetitive letter may lose you the reader's interest and sometimes even your credibility.

Start with a short introductory paragraph. In this opening paragraph introduce yourself or confirm who you are, your relationship to the reader and one sentence stating your reason for writing.

2

Summarize your issue or concern.

3

- Start with a chronological recounting of events.
- Depending on how much the reader already knows about your concern, include more or less detail as is appropriate.
- Omit information that makes no difference to the outcome.
- Recount the facts as if you were an outside observer so that you can state what happened without judgment, blame or assumptions.

State why you are asking for what you are asking for. Why do you want a certain outcome? Stating only what you want reduces options and is not the best motivator for exploring what might work. Providing the "why" gives some dimension to your request and might allow the reader to see your issue from a different perspective.

4

5

Close your letter reiterating your request and expressing your appreciation. State what you asking for and then finish by thanking the reader for considering your letter. If the issue is time-sensitive, ask the reader to respond to you within a reasonable time frame.

Edit and proofread. Make sure there are no grammatical errors. It is helpful if you can have someone you trust proofread your letter for spelling and grammar, clarity, tone and completeness.

6

SAMPLE LETTER

1

[Name and Title]
[Department and Faculty Address]

[Date]

Dear _____,

[Subject Line]

I am writing to follow up on our telephone conversation of February 19th, 2016. As I indicated, I am a third year student in the Department of _____ and I am requesting that the agreement reached with Professor _____ and myself regarding my request for academic concession in my course, _____ be approved.

At the beginning of this term, my father became very ill and was hospitalized for over six weeks. As a result, I missed about three weeks of the course. This course places a strong emphasis on in-class participation. At first, the Department undergraduate coordinator agreed that I could re-take the course the following term without a “W” standing on my academic record. but, in recent discussions with my instructor, we came to an agreement that I would be allowed to complete an alternate study program instead of re-taking the course. I am very thankful for her understanding.

Based on this agreement, I accepted a job which will assist me greatly in alleviating the financial challenges I am currently experiencing. A few weeks ago, I was contacted by the undergraduate coordinator and told that the agreement made with Professor _____ was against departmental policy and that I would be required to re-take the course next term after all.

I am unable to re-take the course next term without quitting my job because of the scheduling of the course. My financial responsibilities require me to have an income at this time and without it, my ability to continue my studies here at UBC will be jeopardized. I am hopeful that you will consider my extenuating circumstances and the negative impact re-taking the course will have on me.

I am requesting that based on the circumstances in my situation and given the fact that I relied in good faith on the agreement made with my professor, that I can continue with the alternate plan to complete the course this term. Is it possible for you to grant me an exception to the departmental policy?

Thank you for considering my request. Your reply before February 28th would be greatly appreciated as the alternate study program is scheduled to begin on March 9th.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

[Your name and Student Number]