

Introduction to Philosophy

Change Making Letter

In about 700 words, write a letter about a social, political, or communal issue you care about.

Very Important!

This letter should address a social, political, or communal issue that personally affected or affects you. Ideally, the letter should be addressed to a specific person whom you know. This letter should be about a small issue that you care about, not a big national or international issue (it should not be about global poverty, sex trafficking, a corporation's labor policies, or laws regarding abortion or drugs).

Examples

Here are some examples that other students have done for their change making letters:

- Emailing the head of the campus cafeteria asking for more vegan options.
- Writing to elders at their place of worship asking for dancing policy changes.
- Writing to their parent's doctor asking to stop prescribing painkillers for the parent.
- Writing to their former high school principal suggesting equitable dress code policy.

Here's What I Want You to Do

Your change making letter should have following structure:

- Begin by addressing the letter to a specific person who can do something about the problem you are addressing.
- Make it very clear in your first paragraph what it is you are asking them to do. This should be a realistic step the person you are writing to can actually take to address a problem.
- Explain what problem you are addressing.
- Explain your (realistic and doable) solution.
- Support your solution with powerful arguments and reliable evidence. (Reliable evidence can be hard to obtain, so pick it carefully!)
- Imagine that the person you are writing to objects to or criticizes your arguments and evidence. In a separate paragraph, bring up possible criticism and your solutions or ideas related to it. You want to explain why what you are asking and your ideas are reasonable, given the possible criticism.
- Conclude with an effective call to action that echoes your first paragraph.

Here's Why I Want You to Do It

I am having you write this change making letter because this activity has you...

- Develop your skills for persuasive argumentation.
- Apply normative analysis to issues in your own life.
- Reflect on actions that may lead to positive social, political, or communal change.

This "Experiment in Philosophy" is based upon a similar "Experiment in Ethics" from Ramona Ilea and Monica Janzen. I highly encourage you to visit their website on Engaged Philosophy (<https://www.engagedphilosophy.com>) for much more!

Change Making Letter (Continued)

Here's How to Do It

- Strive for clear, well-organized, and straightforward writing. This is preferable when you are dealing with complex and controversial topics.
- Help make your letter very clear and well organized by ensuring that each paragraph is clearly focused on 1 and only 1 idea. It's a good idea to state this idea clearly in the beginning (or at the end) of your paragraph and then organize your paragraph in such a way that it provides support for this idea.
- Make sure your tone is respectful and constructive. After all, you are writing to someone in power who may disagree with your position.
- Remember that the person to whom you are writing probably knows a lot about your issue; they might disagree with you, but they also might have thought about this issue for a very long time.
- You should double- and triple-check your spelling and grammar before handing in your letter. **There should be no mistakes** whatsoever. You should also read your letter aloud and you can also make Word read the letter aloud to you; this seems like a silly idea but **reading your letter slowly and loudly will help you identify awkward and unclear sentences**. You should also **give your paper to a couple of friends to read and ask them for detailed and honest feedback**. Ask them what they think about your tone, your writing style, and of course, your arguments.
- If writing this letter is hard for you—**GET HELP—FREE** from the Center for Excellence in Writing (CEW).
 - Location: Norton Hall 17
 - Email: writing@buffalo.edu
 - Website: <https://www.buffalo.edu/writing.html>
 - Schedule your appointment on Navigate: <https://buffalo.navigate.eab.com/>
- I am also here to help! Let me know if you have any questions.

Important Steps!

In order to help you write a strong letter, you will complete this experiment across multiple steps:

- You will write a **change making letter draft** that I will share with some of your classmates for peer evaluation.
- You will participate in **change making letter peer evaluations**, where you receive feedback on your letter while also giving feedback to the letters of your classmates.
- You will submit your final **change making letter** to me.
- Finally, your **change making letter is mailed**, either as a signed letter that I will put in an envelop and mail, or as an email that you BCC me on.

See the course schedule for when each of these specific steps is due.

Here's How It Will Be Graded

Your change making letter will be assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Appropriate topic (see the "very important" guidelines above).
2. Persuasive arguments, counterarguments, and responses.
3. Extremely polished (no grammatical mistakes, no typos) and college-level writing.
4. Crystal clear organization.
5. Word count. (Letters that are either shorter than 600 words or longer than 750 words will incur a large penalty.)

Change Making Letter (Continued)

Collaboration & Academic Integrity

Since the change making letter has you identify and address an issue that personally affects *you*, I expect you to write your letter on your own without resorting to artificial intelligence (AI) tools to write it for you. (Perhaps not too surprisingly, AI tools do a pretty bad job in completing these sorts of letters.) After all, I am primarily interested in how *you* are thinking about the social, political, and communal issues that affect you!

As a result, **change making letters are not group activities**; you must write your letter on your own. Let me know if you are struggling and I'll gladly help!

However, I **actually encourage you to talk with your classmates about your letters**. (I am having you all do official peer evaluations, after all!) You might also talk about your letter with friends and family. Just be sure that you write out the results of those conversations on your own and in your own words when putting together your letter.

Above all, **please be honest if you do receive any outside assistance or use the ideas of others**. This includes using AI tools. In any of those cases, be sure to let me know what assistance you received, and I will let you know how to properly acknowledge that assistance in accordance with standards of academic integrity.