

Letter Writing Tips

Sometimes a formal letter works best as an effective means of being heard. The advantages of putting your request or concerns in writing is that there is a record kept of that request and you are also more likely to receive a formal written response. Obviously, if you don't get a response – chase it up and be persistent!

However, how many times do we write formal letters these days? It can be quite daunting to know where to start so we've given you some tips:

Top Tips

- Keep it brief and to the point – you want the letter to be read so, try to keep it to a maximum of two pages and break it up into paragraphs.
- It's fine to hand-write your letter if you don't have access to a computer.
- Keep a copy for your records.
- It can be a good idea to ask someone else just to read it through before you send it – just to make sure that you've been clear in what you're saying and asking for.

STARTERS: The name, title and address of the person who you are writing to in the top left- hand corner. Your address goes on the right-hand side at the top of the letter with the date a line or two below it.

ADDRESSING YOUR CORRESPONDENT: e.g. *Dear Mr Smith* – don't use first names, or a combination i.e. *Dear Joanna Trollope* or address a collective i.e. *Dear CMHT*. If you don't know the name of the person then it is *Dear Sir/ Madam*, in rare circumstances it might be 'To whom it may concern' but these are more likely to be statements rather than letters.

The style should look something like this:

*Dr Peeps, Consultant Psychiatrist,
Fallowfields Community Mental Health Team,
Social Services Area Office,
High Street,
Withington
M60 4PS*

My address

16 February 2018

Dear Dr Peeps,

KEEP TO THE POINT: identify the purpose of your letter – what do you want?

e.g. *I am contacting you to request a referral for specialist OCD treatment. / I am writing to you to make a formal complaint about my treatment at BLAH Hospital.*

REDUNDANCY – look at the content – is it all necessary, have you repeated the same word three times in the same sentence or have you made the same point twice?

AVOID USING UNFAMILIAR ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS OR TECHNICAL JARGON:

rule of thumb is to write out in full first time with a bracket abbreviation next to it: e.g. Community Mental Health Team (CMHT), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and from then on you can use the abbreviations as shown.

SPELLING: careful how you use a spell checker....

GRAMMAR: does it flow? Read it back to yourself out loud, put commas in where you have to pause for breath. Use paragraphing when you begin a new topic.

ENDINGS: these are rarely easy...try to keep your letter outcomes focused and positive, you will usually be waiting for them to make the next move ... variety of friendly endings but don't go over the top – 'kindest' (unless you are inviting the consultant to dinner next week) is inappropriate, also 'best' on its own.

Some ideas:

- *Would appreciate your help in resolving this matter*
- *With thanks*

With *Dear Mr/Miss* the standard exit is: *Yours sincerely*

With *Dear Sir/ Madam* it is: *Yours faithfully*

On both please note that *Yours* begins with a capital but the following word begins with a small letter.

COPIES: send copies of your letter to anyone you would want to be informed. Put 'cc' at the bottom of the letter and include a list of everyone you've sent a copy of the letter to.