

RESULTS Canada
Take Action

RESULTS
Canada



Condensed Key Action Tips (Handout)

Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor needs to be to the point with a few key details and maximum impact.

250 words or less

Use a respectful and polite tone

Give it a dynamite title that will draw attention

“Hook” to a headline or current story/issue

Your name and telephone numbers at the bottom

editors need them to confirm you wrote the letter

your personal information will not be published

Email it to as many papers as possible

email addresses are available at www.results-resultats.ca

create an email distribution list once, saves you time later

Copy and paste and send your letter to each editor individually - editors won't publish it if they see it has been sent to other publications as well. You may even want to reword the opening if you can.

Share it your published letter with friends, colleagues, decision makers

Letter to MPs and Key Decision Makers/Policy Makers

Members of parliament and other decision-makers need to hear from you. They are allocating YOUR tax dollars - so it is your right and obligation to provide direction.

Handwritten letters sent by post are most effective

Write from your perspective, make a personal connection to the issue and where possible to the person you are writing to as well

Try to keep your letter to one page, two maximum for first contact

Use the EPIC format (below, in Talking Persuasively) for structure

Invite a response and when you get one, respond back - build the relationship

Talking Persuasively

A Laser talk is a condensed 1-2 minute talk about a particular RESULTS issue. Becoming confident in delivering a laser talk is considered a key asset of a RESULTS advocate. If you can speak effectively to an issue, you can write effectively.

Two minutes or less

A few key facts/figures - do not overload your listener

EPIC format

Engage with an opening line

present the Problem in a line or two

Inform on the effective solution

Call upon your listener to commit to joining you in action

10 great tips for getting your Letter to the Editor published and for maximizing impact!

1. **Find a ‘hook.’** Use current events in the news locally or nationally that can be linked to your issue. It can be anything - a recently released report, an upcoming summit or conference, even a controversy that is attracting public attention! Direct some of that attention your way by hooking it to what you want to say. We have found this greatly increases your chances of people published.
2. **Keep it short.** Be catchy, snappy and always ensure your text ends with a conclusion that takes the form of a demand. Editors like creative, concise, and insightful commentary. If you can't say what you want in three paragraphs or less then you should write an opinion piece, or op-ed. It is usually longer (around 300 words) and develops a more in depth argument on a particular topic.
3. **Adopt the proper tone.** Be respectful and polite. Don't let anger or slander get in the way of a good opportunity to get your point across. Wit and humor can increase your chances of being published.
4. **Expand your reach.** If you are going to the trouble to write one good letter, why not modify it slightly and publish it ten or twenty times? You likely won't have time to research how to “hook it” in every case but don't let that prevent you from distributing your letter more widely. Save time by using the ‘cut and paste’ approach, but make sure you send the letter to each paper individually. Look to the RESULTS Canada website for a media list with up-to-date email publications for publications across Canada.
5. **Don't discriminate!** Local community papers are underutilized and often go begging for good, publishable letters. Consider writing to them as well as larger National Dailies. Don't forget magazines and on-line publications as well.
6. **Display authorship.** The strength of a letter to the editor is that it represents the view of an ordinary citizen. RESULTS Canada volunteers learn about an issue and then write from their heart and with their own “voice”. Most papers need to confirm authorship of your letter so always include your name, address and a daytime telephone number in the signature block.
7. **Dynamite title.** Once you have completed your letter, give it a title that will draw attention. Newspapers reserve the right to change your title and often do so. However, if the title you are proposing attracts the attention of the Editor, your chances of getting your letter published are much higher.
8. **Share it!** Letters to the Editor have impact beyond their publication date. After, or even before you are published, share your letter with colleagues, friends, decision-makers. We know that letters and opinion pieces are tracked and monitored by government officials - but don't take a chance. Use your letter as your personal calling card and take the time to broadcast your message beyond the printed page.
9. **Don't give up.** If your letter hasn't been published after a couple of days, call the letters editor and ask him or her for their reasons. Find out what it would take to get published next time.
10. **Track it.** When you're published, share that info with RESULTS Canada by copying and pasting you published letter onto our publications database at www.results-resultats.ca or sharing it with us at grassroots@results-resultats.ca

Making Friends and Influencing Policymakers: Tips for meeting with your MP

Why meet with your MP?

To strengthen relationships with MPs and make them champions on our issues.

Advocacy is all about relationship building - a face to face meeting on our issues is the most impactful tool in our advocacy arsenal.

MPs need to be in touch with the concerns of constituents in order to represent them and to be re-elected. You are an MP's best resource!

Tips for getting a meeting

Phone the MP's constituency office and request a meeting. Say that you want to talk about an issue that you, and many Canadians, feel passionate about - global poverty. If you are a constituent of this MP highlight that in your request - an MP is much more likely to meet with a constituent than any other concerned citizens. If you aren't a constituent, you increase your chances of getting a meeting by inviting a friend who is a constituent to come to the meeting and asking that friend to make the appointment.

It can take several calls and many weeks to get an appointment - don't be discouraged and keep a firm but friendly tone. If you are offered a meeting with an aide vs. the MP take it - aides are the gatekeepers in an MP's office - they prioritize agendas and provide advice. They can also be your best ally in getting a face-to-face MP meeting in the future.

Things to keep in mind while preparing for your meeting

RESULTS Canada staff can provide you with short briefing documents with key points to prepare for your meeting and to leave behind with MPs. Practice a short speech (maximum 2 minutes per topic) that gets across the problems and recommended solutions and action you want to the MP to take ("Laser Talk").

You are building a relationship so learn a little about the MP in advance of the meeting and make some small talk when you meet. Let each member of the group introduce themselves (very briefly).

If you have more than one person going to the meeting, choose a group leader. The chosen group leader should confirm the time the MP has available at the beginning of the meeting and ensure the group wraps up within that time.

Do your research - you can strengthen your own personal connection to the MP or identify a pet-cause or connection to your issue by reviewing an MP's website and bio in advance of the meeting.

The leader should make a personal connection to the issue at the beginning of the conversation. An example: "We know you have been a real leader on women's issues and that you would want to more about this opportunity for Canada to make a difference in the lives of poor women around the world."

Keep a diplomatic and constructive tone; there is nothing to gain by being disrespectful.

Conclude each issue discussion by asking, "Can we count on you to (do such and such)?" At the end of the meeting the leader should restate what the MP has agreed to do, thank the MP, and say

he/she will follow up with the MP in 3-4 weeks. Put it in your calendar and make sure you do follow up.

Make sure someone in the group follows up with a handwritten note of thanks to the MP within a day of the meeting

Share the intelligence you gather with RESULTS staff. Did you get a commitment? Is there follow up information you promised your MP? Did they give you a lead? Etc. Then please communicate this information to RESULTS at grassroots@results-resultats.ca.

One meeting is just the beginning of the relationship...

As MP David McGuinty told our Ottawa student group recently, the first meeting is only the beginning of the relationship. Plan ahead to a future appointment to reconnect and update the MP. When you write letters, remind the MP of your previous meeting with him/her.

Writing to Policymakers

Decision-makers, including parliamentarians and government officials, need to hear from you. As a Canadian, and as a taxpayer, you provide a valuable perspective on which initiatives should be prioritized and where your tax dollars should be directed. As a RESULTS volunteer, your voice supports cost-effective proven solutions to lift families out of poverty.

Handwritten letters are most effective

Write from your perspective - make a personal connection to the issue and, where possible, to the person you are writing to as well

Try to keep your letter to one page, two at maximum

Regular post and fax work best - even better, do both, fax then mail it! Time and again policymakers tell us emails generally have less impact and many are summarily met with a form response.

Writing an MP at the House of Commons is free (House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6)

MP fax numbers are available online at the [House of Common page](#)

Be sure to include all of your contact information so the person you are writing can reply.

When you receive a response, reply again, this will help develop a written dialogue and build a relationship.

The EPIC model used for speaking powerfully is also used for writing powerfully

	Dear _____,
Engage	As a mother of two small children, I was shocked to find out that over 70 million primary school-aged children are not in school.
Problem	Too often, the only thing standing in the way of these children having access to a brighter future are school fees, often as little as \$50 a year.
Inform about the Solution	How can we expect any country to develop to its full potential when its children are not getting educated? Not one developed country has been able to do so without first making education free and compulsory for its children. When school fees were dropped in Kenya over 1.2 million new children showed up for school.
Call to Action	Can I count on you, in your role as MP, to write a letter to the World Bank to them to stop making school fees mandatory parts of any funding given to the governments of developing countries?

Date of MP visit:

Participants (Please list your names and contact information, add a * beside names of volunteers who are constituents of this MP):

Type of meeting (e.g. constituency office; private meeting, etc.):

MP's name:

Constituency:

MP staff present:

.....

1. Please briefly list the issue(s) discussed.
2. What was the "ask" and the MP's response?
3. What was the MP especially interested in?
4. What is required in the way of follow-up (e.g. requested information, other meetings?)
5. What were your general impressions of the meeting?

Speaking powerfully: Laser Talk

We teach our advocates how to speak powerfully by creating a short and compelling speech that we call a “laser talk.” These powerful, short talks typically get the listener’s attention, then present a problem, a solution, and a specific request. The laser talk is one of the tools we use to become supremely effective advocates.

Let’s say you approach your member of parliament at a town hall meeting, connect with a busy editorial writer on the telephone, or catch the attention of a friend. Typically, you will only have one or two minutes to get your point across. Learning the “laser” format and a handful of laser talks will help you make the most of these opportunities to advance our issues.

A RESULTS laser talk has four sections. An easy way to remember these four sections is the word EPIC:

Engage

Problem

Inform

Call to Action

The first section is E for **Engage**. Here, you want to get your listener’s attention with a dramatic fact or short statement, or by thanking them for something specific they have done. Keep this opening statement to one sentence, if possible. For instance, you could say:

“Over 1 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day, yet Canadian foreign assistance is still well below the 0.7% of Gross National Income Canada made a commitment to decades ago.”

Then follow with the second section, P, for **Problem**. Here you present causes, or elaborate on the problem statement you used to engage the listener. Try to connect the problem to an issue that the listener is likely to care about like personal security or children. For our example on how to speak to a member of parliament on foreign aid you could say:

“Although the House of Commons unanimously passed a groundbreaking resolution in 2005 to set a plan to give 0.7% of GNI in aid annually by 2015, no plan has yet been made. At the same time, poverty increases in the developing world, aggravated by the economic crisis and climate change.”

The third part of the EPIC laser talk is I, for **Inform**. Here you inform the listener about a solution to the problem you just presented. Try to present your solution by giving examples of how and where it has worked, how it is a proven and cost-effective solution, and how it has benefited the poorest. For example, you could site a recent study or report, or use a credible statistic. You might also think of the

“I” in EPIC as “Illustrate” instead of “Inform” and provide a concrete example that demonstrates the power of the solution you are proposing or paint the picture based on your own first-hand experience. An example of the “I” part of the EPIC laser talk could be:

“Most other G8/G20 countries have either met this international target or have firm plans to meet it by 2015. Delivering on our promise to give 0.7% would greatly increase Canada's leadership credibility, especially in the face of recent criticism on the global stage. More importantly, by investing in cost-effective, proven solutions to poverty - like maternal and child health, education, sanitation and hygiene, and microfinance - lives will be saved and countries strengthened.”

The final section of the laser talk is the “C” in EPIC or **Call to Action**. Now that you’ve engaged your listener, presented the problem and informed them of a solution, you want to call them to action. Some tips for structuring your call to action are:

1. Make your action very concrete and specific so that you will be able to follow up with your listener and determine whether or not he or she has taken the action.
2. Present the action in the form of a yes-or-no question.
3. State the call to action in one sentence.

An example for the Call to Action for our laser talk about reforming foreign aid could be:

“Would you write to Minister of International Cooperation Bev Oda and Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty and urge them to set a firm timeline to reach 0.7% by 2015?”

So you see, putting a laser talk together isn’t that hard if you have some information and use the EPIC format as a guide. The laser talk we just created could be used to ask an MP or Senator to take action in a face-to-face or town hall meeting, or you could adapt it to call a member of the media. You could also use it to educate your neighbor and involve him or her in taking action with your local RESULTS Canada chapter. Often, you’ll use a laser talk to “hook” your listener and then tell them a story to draw them in further into the issue.

Before you try using a laser talk, whether it is written by you or someone else, you will need to practice it and become comfortable with it in order for it to be a real speaking tool. To learn a laser talk you should practice it out loud to yourself and to another person until you feel comfortable. You should also know that you might not always use the laser talk exactly as you learned it, because conversations vary. If you learn it well, you will be able to use sections of the talk as you need it. Learning a good repertoire of laser talks that you can use when the time is right will help make you a powerful, opportunistic speaker for the end of poverty.

Speaking powerfully: Storytelling

Why tell moving stories? Because moving stories captivate us and reach us at the core of our being. They can make us laugh and make us cry. Let's use a brief example to demonstrate why moving stories are so powerful:

“UNICEF recently reported that, for the first time in history, the number of children dying each year of largely preventable causes fell below 9 million in 2008. However that still means over 24,000 children die each day from preventable illnesses like diarrhea, pneumonia, measles, and malaria.”

Here is the second example:

“My years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger taught me many things – some of them profound, and some of them tragic. One of the tragic lessons I learned was that the number of parents who experience the pain of needlessly losing a child is not equally shared around the globe. This lesson became particularly poignant the day that Issa, my blacksmith friend and neighbor, walked into my mud hut with panic and shock written on his face. ‘Please come and see my baby. She’s sick and doesn’t even know who I am,’ he managed to say. When I arrived, the beautiful baby was listless, but breathing. As I watched her and stroked her black hair I could see the life ebbing out of her, her breathing slowing until it stopped. I immediately crouched on the floor, put two fingers on her sternum and tried frantically to breath life back in to her, as Biba and Issa looked on in horror. I knew there wasn’t a doctor or a health facility for miles that could help me, so I just continued working on her. The infant finally expired in my arms and Biba wailed. I never found out why she died. But I knew that she never really had the same chance to live a full life as those who have access to vaccinations, clean water, and medical facilities. She was one of the 10 million preventable child deaths that year, and I will never forget that day.”

So both examples are powerful, but the second one puts a face on the problem in a way that is gut-wrenching and elicits an emotional reaction. This is what moving stories do; they take something that could seem abstract and impersonal, like a statistic, and turn it into something very personal and emotional. A moving story softens the listener and appeals to their humanity in a way that facts alone cannot. For this reason, it is hard really to find anyone who does not appreciate a moving story.

We use moving stories to help community members, the media, and members of parliament really be touched by both the problems of poverty and their solutions.

Stories can be memorized, like we do with laser talks, or if they are longer, we can read them to our audience. The best ones illustrate the problem and the solution, providing both numbers and a human element that we can all relate to.

Your members of parliament, like most people, remember stories that move them. Learn and recite the ones that RESULTS Canada provides (look for “Stories” under each issue in our “Issues” section), and find and create your own powerful stories. Stories are the key to changing hearts and minds, and a critical tool in our advocacy.