

The Power of the Pen: Writing a Letter of Inquiry for Social Change

Materials Needed

- Paper and pens/pencils or a computer with word processing software
- A list of local or global social issues (provided in lesson or brainstormed)
- Sample business letter template
- Envelope and stamp (optional, for mailing the final product)
- Access to the internet or a directory to find contact information

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Identify a specific social issue and a relevant stakeholder or organization associated with it.
- Distinguish between a general complaint and a formal Letter of Inquiry.
- Draft a professional letter using correct formal formatting (Heading, Salutation, Body, Closing).
- Formulate clear, purposeful questions intended to elicit specific information about a social problem.

1. Introduction: The Hook (10 Minutes)

The Scenario: Imagine you walk past a local park every day and notice that the playground equipment is broken and there are no recycling bins. You want to help, but you don't know why it hasn't been fixed or if there is a plan to improve it. You could post on social media, or you could go straight to the person who makes the decisions.

Discussion:

- Who has the power to change things in a community? (Governments, CEOs, Non-profit directors, etc.)
- Why might a formal letter be more effective than a comment on a video or a casual conversation?

Objective Statement: "Today, we are going to learn how to write a formal Letter of Inquiry. This isn't just a letter to say you're unhappy; it's a tool to gather information, express interest, and open a door for real-world change."

2. Body: Content & Practice (40 Minutes)

I Do: Modeling the Structure (10 Minutes)

Explain that a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) follows a "Business Format." Model the following components on a board or shared screen:

1. **The Header:** Your contact info and the date, followed by the recipient's name and address.
2. **The Salutation:** "Dear [Title and Last Name]," (Never "Hey" or "Hi").
3. **The Opening:** State clearly who you are and why you are writing. *Example: "I am a local student concerned about the increase in plastic waste in our downtown district."*
4. **The Inquiry (The "Ask"):** This is the core. Ask 2-3 specific questions. *Example: "What current initiatives are in place to reduce single-use plastics? Is there a budget allocated for more public recycling bins?"*
5. **The Closing:** A polite thank you and a "Call to Action" (asking for a response).
6. **Sign-off:** "Sincerely," followed by your name.

We Do: Guided Brainstorming (10 Minutes)

Together, choose a sample social issue (e.g., "Lack of affordable youth sports programs").

- **Identify the Recipient:** Who handles this? (The City Council or the Parks and Rec Department).
- **Draft the Inquiry:** Brainstorm three "Power Questions" that aren't just Yes/No.
 - *Weak:* Do you like sports?
 - *Strong:* What criteria are used to determine the cost of local soccer leagues for low-income families?

You Do: Independent Writing (20 Minutes)

Learners choose a social issue they are personally passionate about (e.g., animal welfare, climate change, homelessness, digital privacy). Using the structure provided, they will draft their own letter.

Task Steps:

1. Select an issue and a specific person/organization to contact.
2. Research the correct mailing address or email.
3. Draft the letter focusing on a professional, respectful tone.
4. Self-check against the "Success Criteria" list.

3. Conclusion: Closure & Recap (10 Minutes)

Review: Ask the learner to summarize the three main parts of the letter's body (Introduction, Questions, Call to Action).

Peer/Self-Reflection: Have the learner read their "Power Questions" aloud. Does the question encourage a detailed response? Is the tone respectful?

The "So What?": Discuss how sending this letter is a form of "Civic Engagement." Even if the recipient doesn't have an immediate solution, knowing that a constituent/citizen is asking questions puts the issue on their radar.

Success Criteria

Element	Requirement
Format	Correct business layout (addresses, date, formal greeting).
Clarity	The social issue is clearly identified in the first paragraph.

Element	Requirement
The Inquiry	Includes at least two specific, open-ended questions.
Tone	The language is professional, polite, and objective.

Assessment

Formative Assessment: During the "We Do" phase, check for the ability to distinguish between an emotional outburst and a professional inquiry.

Summative Assessment: Evaluate the final letter draft based on the Success Criteria table above. A "passing" grade or successful completion is a letter that could realistically be mailed to a professional organization without edits.

Differentiation & Adaptability

- **For Struggling Writers (Scaffolding):** Provide a "Fill-in-the-Blank" template where the learner only needs to insert the recipient and their specific questions.
- **For Advanced Learners (Extension):** Ask the student to research a specific piece of legislation or a recent news article related to their issue and reference it in the letter to show deep knowledge.
- **For Groups/Classrooms:** Use a "Think-Pair-Share" for the brainstorming phase, allowing students to critique each other's questions for clarity and tone.