When to Write a Letter

Some university policies may require the writing of a letter. A letter is sometimes the most effective way to send a particular message. When talking to someone, using email or filling out a form haven't worked or aren't practical, try a letter.

Send the letter directly to the office, department or individuals involved in the situation.

Format

Elements:

Most appeal or request letters should include the following information:

1. Your email address or phone number
2. Date on which letter is written
3. Salutation to the appropriate person or committee
4. Purpose of letter in first sentence
5. Body of letter (main text)
6. Complimentary closing
7. Signature line (be sure to sign your letter)

Model Letter:

Note: the text of the model letter is dependent on the purpose of your letter. Be sure to review your letter for accuracy and personalized information.

Email address and/or phone number

February X, 20XX

To Whom This May Concern,

I am writing to request an appeal of my Satisfactory Academic Progress. There were several factors that contributed to my academic progress. Important questions to address:

- What circumstances/life situations affected your studies (e.g. family or life hardships, health, disability, etc.)?
- How did this impact your academic performance (studying, going to class, test-taking, time management, hours spent on school work, etc)?

- What changes have you made since these circumstances?
- How did these changes impact your academic performance?
- What resources are you currently utilizing or plan to utilize that might help?
- What barriers prevent you from being in good standing?
- How can you negotiate these barriers?
- Is this reasonable at this time?

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. Please contact me by email or phone if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Your signature

Your Name
VCU ID Number

Content and Tone

While the appearance of a letter is important, the content and tone will determine whether the letter really does its job. Review any relevant policy and pay particular attention to what the decision maker needs to know to consider an appeal or request. That is the information which should be included in your letter.

Opening Statement
The first sentence or two should state the purpose of the letter clearly.

I am writing to request a retroactive withdrawal from my Spring 2026 courses…

I am writing to request a review of my scholarship eligibility…

Be Factual
Include factual detail but avoid dramatizing the situation.

In late October I was diagnosed with tonsillitis. I was sick for over a week, and missed most of my mid-term exams.

NOT: *In late October after feeling really sick for a few days I finally dragged myself to Student Health Services…*

Be Specific
If an appeal or request depends on particular facts which the decision maker will want to verify, be specific.

I missed a test on January 23, because I flew to Florida on January 19 for my grandfather's funeral and returned on January 26. I enclose the airline receipt and can provide further corroboration if that would be helpful.

NOT: *I had to attend a funeral out of town so I missed the test on January 23.*

Documentation
Include any documentation required by policy or needed to substantiate your claims. If documentation is being sent by a third party, state that with details.

Stick to the Point
Don't clutter your letter with information or requests that have no essential connection to the main message.

Do Not Try to Manipulate the Reader
Threatening, cajoling, begging, pleading, flattery and making extravagant promises are manipulative and usually ineffective methods.

If you give me a chance to get my scholarship back next year, I promise to work really hard, get rich, and donate a million dollars to the University…

How to Talk About Feelings
It is tempting to overstate the case when something is important to us. When feelings are a legitimate part of a message, own the feeling, and state it as a fact.

When I saw my grade, I was very disappointed.

Be Brief
It is more work to write a good short letter than a long one. Busy decision makers appreciate the extra effort.

Avoid errors
A letter will make a better impression if it is typed; free of spelling and grammar mistakes; free of slang; and placed in the right sized envelope. BUT it is much more important to meet deadlines and state the purpose clearly than to submit a letter which is completely error-free.

Keep Copies
Until a matter is settled, keep copies of all letters sent or received, as well as relevant documents and forms.

Submitting the Letter

Before submitting your letter, review it for accuracy and errors. Save the letter with a succinct and clear title, such as: “SAP Appeal Letter- Your Name”.

Most letters should be submitted as a PDF, but refer to the instructions for your specific process to confirm if there are format specifications.

Be sure to review the submission guidelines and submit or email your letter to the appropriate parties.

**Resource adapted from UCI School of Social Ecology*