Writing Publicly to Influence Policy Makers

Key Method
Educators use effective writing strategies to influence policy makers on the local, state, or national level to activate them to engage with, take action on, or have a conversation around a specific policy, program, funding proposal, or initiative.

Method Components
Writing is a powerful medium for influencing policy makers because it offers permanence, portability, and accessibility. Additionally, research has shown that the majority of Americans have “trust and confidence in teachers” (PDK/Gallup 2014). Teachers should leverage the public’s confidence to advocate for policies that support best practices.

An article outlining the influence of teachers’ unions acknowledges their clout in shaping national education policy (Antonucci 2010). Therefore, educators could use writing in union publications as an avenue to access policy makers. A number of forms could be used to reach policy makers through writing:

- Briefs and memos
- White papers
- Newsletters
- Open letters (digital or print)
- Articles (print and digital publications)
- Wikis and websites
- Blog posts
- Social media posts
- Books
- Other public writing

Different formats will have the potential to reach audiences of different sizes, and some channels may be more appropriate than others for some issues.

Effective writing uses specific methods to capture the audience’s attention, validate readers’ concerns, acknowledge their values, and connect with their emotions. The following strategies can be used to create effective written communication:

1. Introducing or supporting ideas through powerful storytelling about student success and compelling anecdotes that give a personal angle on policy decisions
2. Promoting the credibility of the author and his or her sources
3. Framing the message through the lens of the policy maker’s values, needs, and emotional sensibilities
4. Keeping communication concise to promote further dialogue

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5. Connecting to the audience through specific word choice that acknowledges readers’ values, needs, and priorities
6. Avoiding insider jargon, such as highly technical terms or education-specific acronyms that could cause confusion or distract from a call to action
7. Using inductive and deductive reasoning to craft powerful arguments
8. Referencing data and research that validate the connection between an idea and positive outcomes for students or the educational community
9. Incorporating visual components (graphs, tables, images, or charts) to reinforce ideas, arguments, and calls to action

Supporting Research


Resources

Purdue Owl Writing Resources. The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University offers an array of writing resources and instructional material. The following links offer explanations and examples of a variety of writing strategies and skills that are essential for influencing an audience.

- APA Style Guide, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/)
- APA In-text Citations, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/03/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/03/)
- Conciseness in Writing, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/01/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/01/)
- Using Research in Writing, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/9/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/9/)
- Using Appropriate Language, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01/)
- Using Rhetorical Strategies for Persuasion, [https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/04/](https://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/04/)

Digital Writing 101: Handbooks & Articles on Writing for Web Audiences by Amy Goodloe. This online resource compiles blog posts and short web articles on a variety of skills relevant to digital writing and online publication. The first set of links is most useful to address formatting and style for online publications. [http://newmediawriting.net/content/resources-on-writing-for-web-audiences/](http://newmediawriting.net/content/resources-on-writing-for-web-audiences/)

Five Basic Tips for Digital Media by International Journalists Network. Another web article about how to write to an online audience. This one offers some quick tips to “improve your writing for the Internet,” but focuses mainly on formatting and organizing text. [https://ijnet.org/en/stories/how-improve-your-writing-internet](https://ijnet.org/en/stories/how-improve-your-writing-internet)

Teaching that Sticks by Chip and Dan Heath. Borrowing from the content of their best-selling book Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, this short article focuses on the six traits that “make ideas stickier,” including storytelling, establishing credibility, and offering concrete images to illustrate abstract concepts. Although it's not specifically about writing, this resource will help you frame the message for your audience. [http://heathbrothers.com/download/mts-teaching-that-sticks.pdf](http://heathbrothers.com/download/mts-teaching-that-sticks.pdf)

The SUCCESS Model by Chip and Dan Heath. This simple graphic summarizes the principles of “Teaching that Sticks” in a one-page visual format that would be great to print out and keep close when writing to influence an audience. [http://heathbrothers.com/download/mts-made-to-stick-model.pdf](http://heathbrothers.com/download/mts-made-to-stick-model.pdf)

“Made to Stick” Keynote by Chip and Dan Heath. This presentation offers content similar to “Teaching that Sticks” and the SUCCESS poster, but it dives more deeply into the ideas from Made to Stick and offers a summary of the book's key concepts in an hour-long talk. [https://vimeo.com/5079830](https://vimeo.com/5079830)
Stories That Matter by Marshall Ganz. “The initial challenge for an organizer—or anybody who’s going to provide leadership for change—is to figure out how to break through the inertia of habit to get people to pay attention. . . . We don’t just talk about hope and other values in abstractions. We talk about them in the language of stories because stories are what enable us to communicate these values to one another.”

Click to read this three-page article from a lecturer in public policy at Harvard University. http://bit.ly/1JjLP0p

On Writing Well by William Zinsser. “Zinsser’s book On Writing Well provides both a comprehensive guide to writing nonfiction and a useful writer’s reference. He starts with an overview of the writing craft and moves into specific nonfiction writing forms. The book wraps up with the important attitudes that good writers develop.” http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-on-writing-well/#gsc.tab=0

Exemplars of Writing to a Colleague Audience


To access more exemplars and writing support, join the conversation at the Center for Teaching Quality’s (CTQ) Collaboratory Communication Lab. http://www.teachingquality.org/about, http://www.teachingquality.org/content/communications-lab

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a Proficient or Exemplary evaluation in all four categories for Part 2 and a Passing for Parts 1 and 3.

Part 1. Overview questions

(500-word limit total for both)

- What prompted you to write this piece? Please describe the conversations, current events, or other publications that inspired you to create this piece.
- Who is your audience? Describe the specific group you targeted with as much detail as possible.
  - Passing: Sufficient details are provided about the piece of writing and intended audience to define context.

Part 2. Evidence/artifacts

Submit a piece of writing in one of the following forms: a link to an online document available to policy makers, an image documenting written conversation with policy maker(s), or a PDF of a published piece addressed to policy maker(s). This publication should influence policy maker(s) to engage with, take action on, or have a conversation around a specific policy, program, funding proposal, or initiative. Writing must have been published in the past 24 months.

Your artifact submission will be assessed on the following rubric. You must earn a Proficient or Exemplary score on this portion of the submission in order to earn the micro-credential.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaging the audience</th>
<th>“Exemplary”</th>
<th>“Proficient”</th>
<th>“Developing”</th>
<th>“Attempting”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An exemplary artifact engages the audience through at least three of the following components: intentional formatting, appropriate length, use of visual components, an effective opening.</td>
<td>A proficient artifact engages the audience through at least two of the following components: intentional formatting, appropriate length, use of visual components, an effective opening.</td>
<td>A developing artifact engages the audience through at least one of the following components: intentional formatting, appropriate length, use of visual components, an effective opening.</td>
<td>An artifact in this category does not show intentionality to engage the audience in any of the following components: intentional formatting, appropriate length, use of visual components, an effective opening.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing the message for the audience</td>
<td>An exemplary artifact does all of the following: establishes the credibility of the author and sources, demonstrates understanding of the audience’s values/needs, and uses support to address those values/needs.</td>
<td>A proficient artifact demonstrates understanding of the audience’s values/needs and uses support to address those values/needs. The artifact may also attempt to establish credibility of the author and/or sources.</td>
<td>A developing artifact demonstrates understanding of the audience’s values/needs or uses support to address those values/needs. The artifact may also attempt to establish credibility of the author and/or sources but is unsuccessful.</td>
<td>An attempting artifact does not demonstrate understanding of the audience’s values/needs, use support to address those values/needs, or attempt to establish credibility of the author and/or sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using appropriate language for the audience</td>
<td>An exemplary artifact considers the audience and uses appropriate language consistently throughout the piece.</td>
<td>A proficient artifact considers the audience and uses appropriate language throughout most of the piece.</td>
<td>A developing artifact considers the audience and uses appropriate language sporadically. There are several instances in which the author uses inappropriate language.</td>
<td>An attempting artifact does not consider the audience and uses inappropriate language throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>The written piece appears in a peer-reviewed publication or other venue with broad distribution.</td>
<td>The written piece appears in an appropriate venue with an established audience that matches the writing’s intended audience.</td>
<td>The written piece appears in a venue that nearly matches the piece’s intended audience.</td>
<td>Venue is inappropriate for audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A Proficient rating in this category should not prevent an Exemplary for the submission as a whole.)

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Part 3. Reflection
Submit a reflection answering the following prompts. Your reflection can be submitted in EITHER of the following formats:
- Link to a published, publicly viewable video (4-minute limit)
- Written response saved as a PDF (1,000-word limit)

Prompts
- Identify 2–3 specific choices (i.e., length, formatting, word choice, incorporated support, publication platform) you made that helped to influence one or more policy makers more effectively. Explain these choices and how they affect this audience.
  - **Passing:** Educator clearly identifies 2–3 specific choices that were made to influence policy-makers more effectively, explains these choices, and communicates how they reach the audience.
- What outcomes do you expect your publication to achieve? What is your plan for achieving these outcomes? How would you define success with this publication?
  - **Passing:** Educator clearly defines outcomes from the publication, describes a plan for achieving these outcomes, and articulates success as it relates to this publication.
- To what degree have you achieved your outcomes thus far? Cite specific examples, if possible.
  - **Passing:** Educator communicates the degree to which the outcomes have been achieved, citing specific examples.

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