

Letters for Change: How to Write Persuasive Letters that Move the Needle on Policy

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Letters for Change

Plan for this evening

Intro and background/positioning

A healthy working relationship with anger

The principles of right speech

What can writing a letter achieve? (Why)

Letter-writing pros

Letter-writing cons

The who, what, where and when of letter-writing

Important tips to keep in mind

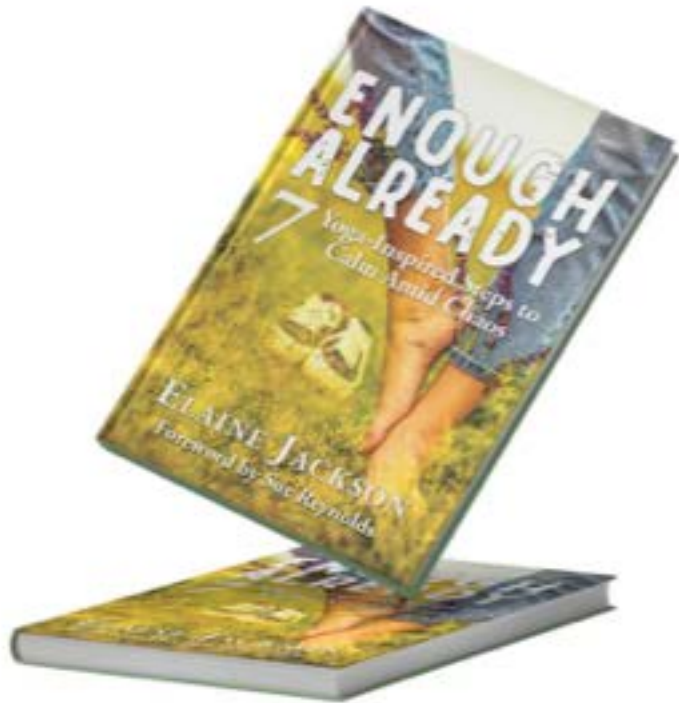
How to's

Practice

Background







A relationship with anger



Anger

- Is motivating and important to preserving life, health, dignity, safety
- Gets things done



The problem with anger

- You can get “stuck.” Symptoms include ruminating, story-telling, “othering” or dehumanizing people.

- You can become rigid, unwilling to compromise, unwilling to listen or take in new information
- Anger can be a way of avoiding deeper feelings, like grief or shame.

- Acknowledging, holding, and managing anger are important skills (and a whole other workshop)
- Repression is not a good option, but neither is unbridled expression
- *Skilled* communication is key

Right Speech

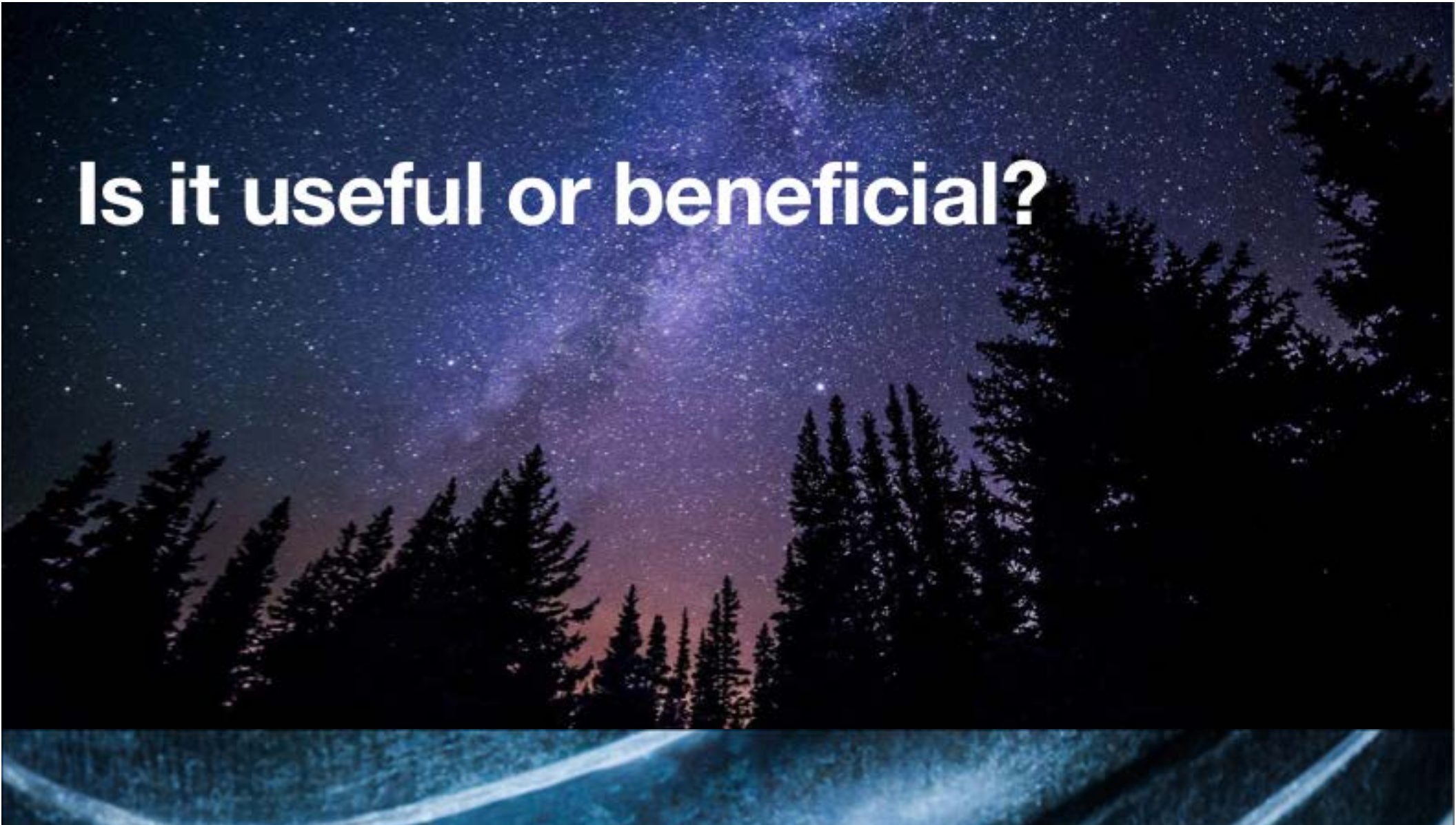
Right Speech has 4 observances,
or 4 questions to ask yourself.





Is it true?

Is it useful or beneficial?





Is it said with kindness?



**Can it be heard/received?
(timing)**



Minds are changed one at a time

The Purpose of Letter Writing

- Communicating and relating
 - Making your voice heard
 - Clarifying what you think and feel
 - Alerting others to issues, awareness-building
 - Brainstorming, suggesting solutions and alternatives
 - Countering the spin-doctors
- Witnessing (e.g. Amnesty International)
 - Supporting and thanking

Letter-Writing Pros

- Time to consider what you want to say
- Efficiency (can send multiple places)
- Make yourself feel less helpless:
Letters=Action
- Letters are effective in shaping strategy
- You can write any time, day or night
- Can encourage and support people who are doing good things

Letter Writing Cons

- Not as effective as in-person communication
- Easy to cross boundaries of good taste or right speech
- It's a one-way process
- You don't get much feedback
- Generally a solitary process

Where to send letters

- Politicians (Federal, Provincial, Municipal)
- Newspapers, Magazines, Newsletters, Community Groups, Individuals, Businesses
- Friends and family

Writing Tips

- Spelling and grammar aren't that important

important

- Sounding human and authentic is important
- Make an attitude choice
- Watch the tone. Imagine receiving this letter
- Stick to the issue
- Keep it short

- Keep it simple
- Be as specific as possible
- Give it a 24 hr rest before sending it, or have a friend read it over
- Let go of attachment to the result

Where do I send it?

- As a general rule: go to the website of the organization
- Navigate to “contact us” and read through the options. Sometimes “Letters to the Editor” is under the “Opinion” tab.
- Have a look at the form. They often will have a word or character limit.
- Snail mail still works.
- Newspapers and magazines have “submission guidelines.”

Sample submission guidelines

Example

Letters to the Editor

Send your contribution to Letters to the Editor via email to lettertoed@thestar.ca; via fax to 416-869-4322; or by mail to One Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E6. Letters must include full name, address and all phone numbers of sender (daytime, evening and cellphone). Street names and phone numbers will not be published. We reserve the right to edit letters, which typically run 50-150 words. Please note: We get many more letters than we have space to print. Due to the volume, we unfortunately cannot acknowledge every submission.

Mechanics

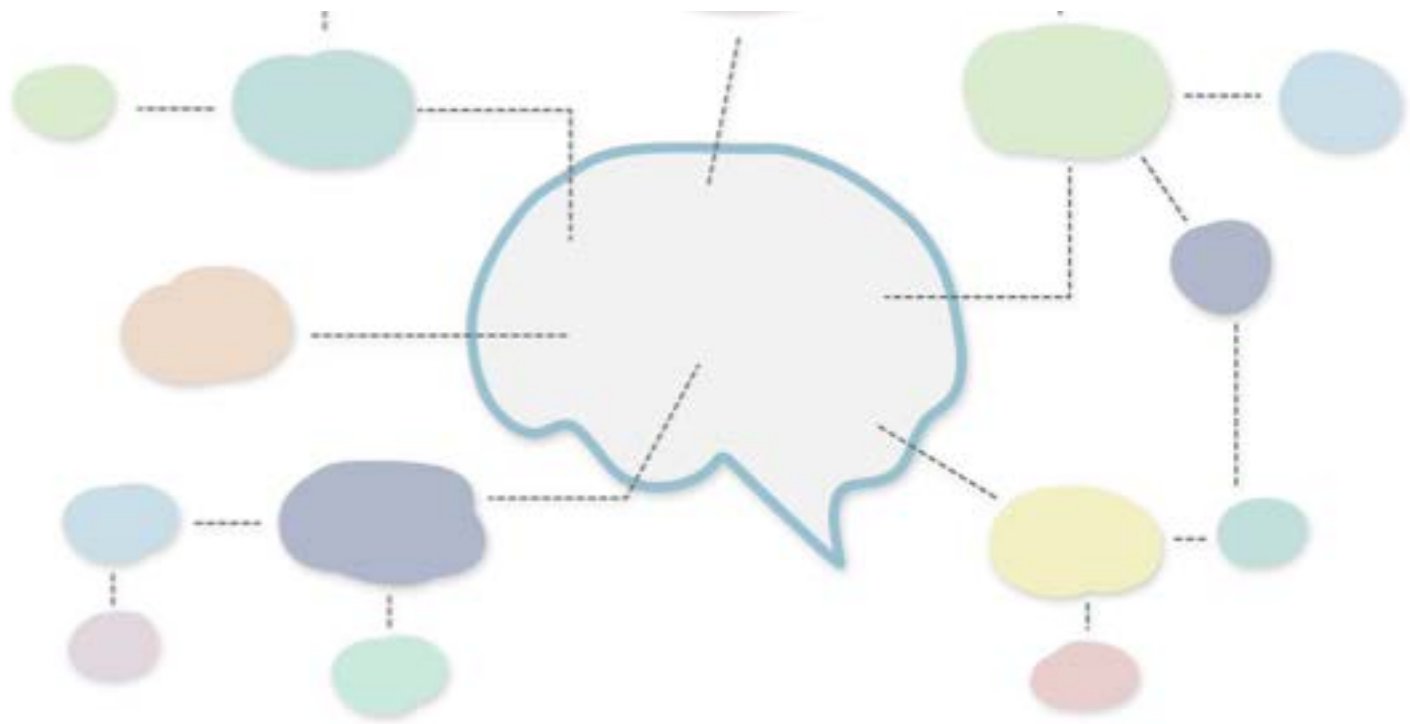
Letter basics

- Greeting (name, or “To whom it may concern”)
- Introduction (Who are you? Why are you called to write?)
- What is the issue?
- What is the solution you would like to see? What do you want the person you are writing to to do?
- Thank you
- Sign off

Suggestions for getting started

- Warm up with something benign just to get your pen and your brain moving
- Practice Exercise 1





? accountability reporting?
Green-



Practice

- Do a first draft. Don't judge, don't edit. Just say what's in your heart.
- What issue is on your mind?
- Why is this issue relevant to you?
- What would you like to see happen?
- Any ideas about how to make it happen?

Revise

- Is it short?
- Is it respectful? (Right speech)
- Let it sit for 24 hours or show it to a friend
- SEND IT!!! (A not-great letter is better than no letter).

Remember

- Grammar and spelling are not important
- Your “expertise” or right to speak out about this issue is not in question. As citizens we have the right and responsibility to speak out where we see harm being done.





Thank You!