

Teacher Package

Canadian and World Studies Exemplar Task Grade 10 Civics – Open

Teacher Package

Title: A Letter of Concern About a Local Issue

Time Requirement: 4 periods of 75 minutes each

Description of Task

This task is designed to encourage students to apply their knowledge and skills in the area of active citizenship. Students are asked to examine and analyse a local issue of community and personal interest and write a letter expressing concern about that issue. This letter must analyse at least two perspectives on the matter and present a reasonable and convincing solution to the problem.

Final Product

The final product will consist of:

- a handwritten or word-processed letter of concern that addresses a local issue and proposes a reasonable solution to the problem;
- a bibliography listing all sources used by the students in completing the necessary research for the task.

Note: The bibliography will not be evaluated as part of the exemplar task but is required to ensure that students list all the sources used in their research.

Teachers should advise students that any quotes taken directly from a source must be appropriately recognized.

Assessment and Evaluation

Students will assess their work by means of the following:

- self-assessment of research notes, using the Checklist for Research Notes (Appendix B)
- peer assessment of the letter, using the Checklist for Peer Editing (Appendix D), and self-assessment of the letter, using the task-specific rubric

The final product will be evaluated by the teacher, using the task-specific rubric.

Expectations Addressed in the Exemplar Task

Students will:

1. describe how their own and others' beliefs and values can be connected to a sense of civic purpose and preferred types of participation;
2. analyse a current public issue that involves conflicting beliefs and values, describing and evaluating the conflicting positions;
3. articulate clearly their personal sense of civic identity and purpose, and understand the diversity of beliefs and values of other individuals and groups in Canadian society;
4. communicate their own beliefs, points of view, and informed judgements, and effectively use appropriate discussion skills (e.g., persuasion, negotiation);
5. demonstrate an ability to research questions and issues of civic importance, and to think critically and creatively about these issues and questions;
6. participate effectively in a civil action or project of interest to them and of importance to the community (e.g., attend public hearings, plan religious or cultural event, join special interest group, write letters to editor).

Teacher Instructions

- Prior to starting the task, collect community newspapers, arrange for speakers and other resources, and/or have students collect relevant articles.
- Book a computer lab, if available, for word processing the letters and conducting Internet searches.
- Encourage peer conferencing and editing.

Prior Knowledge and Skills Required

To complete this task, students should have some knowledge or skills related to the following:

- various types of civic action and their relative effectiveness and appropriateness in different situations
- the responsibilities of municipal and provincial governments
- the inquiry process
- developing arguments and points of view
- detecting bias in sources (e.g., editorials, letters to editor)
- writing persuasively and effectively
- using peer and self-assessment checklists during the writing process to improve their work
- using a word-processing program (optional)
- accessing the Internet and using search engines effectively (optional)
- developing bibliographies

Accommodations

Accommodations that are normally provided in the regular classroom for students with special needs should be provided in the administration of this performance task.

You may wish to review the relevant course profile for specific suggestions for accommodations appropriate for students in special education programs.

Materials and Resources

The following resources may facilitate student selection and research of an issue:

- Access to local community news through
 - newspaper articles
 - magazines
 - televised news
 - radio (call-in shows)
 - Internet access (optional)
 - community experts
- Government websites that provide directories of municipal councillors or members of federal or provincial Parliament
- Phonebooks (blue and yellow pages)
- Computer lab workstations for word processing and Internet searches

Rubric

Introduce the task-specific rubric* to the students when you begin to discuss the task with the students. Review the rubric with the students and ensure that each student understands the criteria and the descriptions for achievement at each level.

Allow ample class time for a thorough reading and discussion of the assessment criteria outlined in the rubric.

Some students may perform below level 1. It will be important to note the characteristics of their work in relation to the criteria in the assessment rubric and to provide feedback to help them improve.

The Exemplar Task: 4 periods of 75 minutes each**Period 1: Introduction, Brainstorming, and Beginning Research**

- Introduce the task to students. Tell them that they are to choose an issue that is of concern to them and to their local community. They will research at least two sides of the subject, develop a potential solution to the problem inherent in the issue, and write a persuasive letter of concern to a person who is in a position to effect change with respect to the matter.
- Inform students that they have four class periods in which to complete the task.
- Review with students the steps of an inquiry model (identify and clarify an issue, explore the issue, consider the options, make a decision, take action, reflect on the results of the action).
- Brainstorm with the students to generate a list of issues specific to their community.
- Have each student identify and clarify a local issue of concern to him or her and to the local community (e.g., in the area of waste management, use of natural resources, transportation, social services, development and construction, city planning). Check that students have narrowed the issue down into a clearly stated question that will guide their research (e.g., Should local residents pay for garbage disposal of more than two bags? Should there be service charges for using the gym or day-care facilities at the local recreational centre? Should a bylaw be changed to allow for a later curfew for teenagers?).
- Although students pick their own issue, you must approve their choice.
- Ask students to begin to collect information from two or more sources. Examples of sources include local/national newspapers, reliable websites, local television or radio programs, and community experts.

Note: To facilitate the research process, students may have been collecting articles on various issues throughout the course or may use resources that you have provided. *Sources must reflect more than one viewpoint.*

Period 2: Organizing and Reviewing Research

- Instruct students to record the information they have gathered from various sources in point form on the chart Organizing Your Research Notes (Appendix A).
- When they have finished their research, ask students to complete the Checklist for Research Notes (Appendix B) to assess their notes.
- After they have reviewed their research notes, ask students to choose the solution that seems most effective, reasonable, and justifiable, based on the information recorded on their Organizing Your Research Notes sheets.

*The rubric is reproduced on pages 14–15 of this document.

Period 3: Drafting the Letter

- Ask each student to identify an appropriate person or organization to whom the letter of concern will be addressed. Examples of appropriate recipients are:
 - the district school board (director/trustees)
 - the mayor or council members
 - regional (county) administration
 - an MP, MPP, or cabinet minister
 - the CEO or health and safety officer of a local company
 - a member of the media
 - a community service group, cultural organization, or volunteer association.
- Have students discuss the following question: “If you received a letter of concern, what would impress you, prompt you to keep reading, and make you want to respond in a positive manner?” The discussion can be held in small groups or among the whole class. During this discussion, the students’ ideas should be recorded on a chart, either by the teacher or by the students working in small groups. A sample chart follows:

An effective letter..	An ineffective letter..
– is well written (contains no errors in grammar, spelling, format)	– is poorly written (contains errors in grammar, spelling, format)
– demonstrates that the writer is informed about the issue	– demonstrates that the writer is not informed about the issue
– is respectful and articulate	– is insulting and insensitive; uses slang
– presents reasonable solutions	– suggests unreasonable solutions
– shows an understanding of obstacles faced by the reader	– assumes that the solution is easy; ignores obstacles

- Discuss the components of a letter of concern with students.
- Using the Template for a Letter of Concern (Appendix C), show a sample outline of a formal letter of concern and discuss the components of a formal letter with the students.
- Ask students to review their research notes and write a first draft of their letter.

Period 4: Assessing Drafts and Completing the Final Product

- Have students partner with a peer-editor for feedback on their first draft. Instruct peer-editors to use the Checklist for Peer Editing (Appendix D).
- After peer editing is completed, ask students to self-assess their letters with reference to the rubric criteria.
- Ask students to produce a final copy of their letter of concern. Remind them to submit a bibliography with their letter.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Organizing Your Research Notes
- Appendix B: Checklist for Research Notes
- Appendix C: Template for a Letter of Concern
- Appendix D: Checklist for Peer Editing

Appendix A: Organizing Your Research Notes

Read through the sources you have gathered and make point-form notes under the following headings.

What is the problem? (Include general statements, facts, and statistics if possible.)	
Viewpoints on the problem	
Viewpoint #1	Viewpoint #2
- - - -	- - - -
What has been done so far? (Identify some actions that have already been taken to address the problem.)	
What should be done? (Identify possible solutions to the problem.)	

Appendix B: Checklist for Research Notes

Self-Assessment

Before proceeding to the next step, complete the following checklist to make sure your research notes are complete and correctly done.

Criteria	Yes	No
Notes are written in point form.		
Notes are written in my own words.		
Sufficient information is provided under each heading.		
Important and detailed information is included (e.g., facts, statistics).		
Sources are recent.		
Sources are reliable.		
Sources represent at least two viewpoints.		
Bibliographic information is included.		

Appendix C: Template for a Letter of Concern

Date

Recipient's Position (e.g., mayor, member of Parliament, health inspector)

Salutation (Dear),

Section 1:

Explain why you are writing this letter and why this issue is of concern to you and to your local community.

Section 2:

Explain what you know about the issue and your understanding of the problem.

Explain that you understand that there are other viewpoints on the issue (multiple perspectives).

Explain one of those viewpoints in addition to your own viewpoint.

Section 3:

Outline your reasonable and realistic solution.

Explain why it is a good solution.

Politely request action.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Citizen

Note: Usually, you would address your letter to a specific person at a correct address, and you would sign your name. For this exercise only, you are asked *not* to include any names or addresses.

Appendix D: Checklist for Peer Editing

Directions:

Read the draft copy of your partner's letter of concern.

Complete the following checklist for your partner as carefully as you can, so that when he or she writes the final copy, your feedback will be constructive and helpful.

Use a ✓ to note the elements that your partner has used in his or her letter of concern.

Elements to Look for in a Letter of Concern	Check ✓
ELEMENTS OF THE LETTER	
The letter has a date.	
The letter includes the position of the recipient.	
The opening salutation is clearly written.	
There are at least three paragraphs in the letter (at least one for each section).	
The letter includes a complimentary closing.	
The letter has been signed "A Concerned Citizen".	
CONTENT OF THE LETTER	
Section 1: Identifies the writer's concern and reasons for the chosen audience.	
Section 2: Outlines the issue from at least two viewpoints.	
Section 3: Outlines and explains solution(s) and requests appropriate action.	
The supporting evidence is relevant to the concern being expressed.	
The supporting evidence is sufficient to support the opinion.	
Words and phrases are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and style.	
The letter meets the purpose of persuading the intended audience to acknowledge the concern and consider the solution.	
LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS	
Words are spelled correctly.	
Vocabulary is appropriate and relevant to the topic.	
Grammar used is correct and effective.	
Punctuation is correct and effective.	