



5.5 Perfect Petitions

We often need to show that a lot of people are supportive of a change in policy. A good way to do this is to get them all to sign a petition which you can show to the person or organisation you are trying to convince.

It's simple, cheap and is easy for supporters and member of the public to do. Here we show you how to do make the most of this classic tool.

The Golden Rule:

Decide exactly what you are going to do with a petition *before* you start it.

This may sound obvious but it doesn't always happen. If you collect signatures and then think about what to do with them, you'll often find you didn't get the right information, or the information at the top was wrong, or they should have signed the letters directly...

Before starting any petition you need to know the following:

- ★ **WHY** you are doing a petition? Don't just assume it's the best thing to do. Think whether sending someone a list of names is the best way to get what you want.
- ★ **WHO** you will send it to? This is crucial. Do you know exactly who you are trying to influence or who has the power to make a change? If you don't know then you need to find out.
- ★ **WHAT** are you asking for? A petition is a request to change something. What do you want to change? What do you want the person who receives it to actually do? Don't just complain, you need to make a request to take a particular action which is reasonable to expect them to do.
- ★ What **TYPE** of petition is best? There are different ways of doing it so pick wisely:
 - The List – put a statement at the top and a table for names, signatures and emails or addresses. Nice and simple. You will still need to write a cover letter to attach to the front of the petition sheets.
 - Individual Letters – print a template letter with a space for people to write their own name and address, get each one signed separately and either post them yourself or ask the supporter to send it.
 - Arty petition - you might get a big banner and ask supporters to put painted hand prints all over with their signature underneath. Good if you want to create a visual display and more fun to get involved with.
 - Online petition – being used more often now, there are plenty of websites such as www.ipetitions.com/ where you can start your own petition.
 - Postcards – the campaign may already have action cards which can simple be filled in and posted, so the work is already done for you.

- ★ **HOW** will you get it done? Be clear on the practicalities before you actually set up and don't make it too difficult to do. For example, if supporters need to write the name of their MP, make sure you have that information available. And if it takes more than 30 seconds to fill in your petition, it's too long.

After you've done your petition there is plenty left to do:

- ★ Keep it safe! Those pieces of paper are now gold dust, so treat them as such and make sure you put them in a safe place.
- ★ Photocopy – always, always, always photocopy your petition so you have a copy yourself. Don't send off your petition and never receive
- ★ Collect emails – if you collected emails (which you should do) then make sure you type them up and keep your new supporters up to date with the campaign!
- ★ Post them – it's very easy to feel that the job is done once the signatures are on that paper, but until the person you're aiming at has seen it you haven't actually done anything yet! Keep going and finish the job.
- ★ Get a response – check your petition has been received and chase up a response.