

What should I write?

General guidance

We don't offer sample messages because it's important that they're heartfelt and personal. But on the whole, it's important to **be friendly, remain nonpartisan, and stay positive about voting**, and the best messages **generate excitement about voting** and make it seem **easy and accessible**.

Please keep in mind that messages about voting because it's your right or because you feel it's your civic duty do not typically resonate with the voters on Vote Forward's lists. (If this is what you were contemplating adding to your letter templates, please keep reading for tips and a training exercise to help you craft a more impactful message.)

Please **avoid messages that highlight consequences of *not* voting**. We have received feedback from voters, and they have said that **this discourages them from voting**. Fear is an inhibiting emotion for most people, so **focusing on what could happen if the letter recipient doesn't vote is counterproductive**.

Statements like this--including ones that say our democracy is at stake--can make people who are not already activists--like Vote Forward letter recipients--want to shut down and block things out, i.e., not vote.

We've also received feedback from a few Vote Forward letter recipients saying that messages about "always voting" or "never missing an election" fell flat with them and had the unintended consequence of making them feel discouraged instead of encouraged about voting.

According to progressive research and communications experts, already engaged voters and activists, like many Vote Forward volunteers, may respond to negative messaging and take a desired action like donating money or voting, but **engaging those who are not yet active--like Vote Forward letter recipients--requires making a positive request to take action, i.e., to vote**. We want everyone who receives a Vote Forward letter to **feel good about voting and being part of the process**.

IMPORTANT. PLEASE READ: As much as you may want to reference Russia or Ukraine in your personal message, **please refrain from mentioning current events**. The letters we're writing now *will not be opened and read by voters until November*, and there is a real risk that a message referencing current events will be out of step or even confusing at that time. For this reason, and to ensure your letters are impactful, stick with messages of encouragement that highlight the importance of voting rather than referencing the current situation.

What works best: *positive, heartfelt, personal stories*

In 2021, we conducted an experiment as part of our [Vote Forward Labs](#) initiative and learned that **letters with “personal story” messages, written by trained volunteers, may be especially motivating for voters**. To craft an impactful "personal story" message to use on your letters, [please see our training exercise](#).

What to avoid: *negative or partisan messaging*

Get-out-the-vote research has shown that **nonpartisan messaging is more effective** than partisan messaging for boosting voter turnout. This is why we ask volunteers to avoid:

- Mentioning candidates by name
- Mentioning political parties
- Framing the message overall in a partisan or one-sided fashion
- Assuming that the recipient agrees with you on issues or policy

It's fine to mention specific issues, just be careful not to assume the recipient agrees with your policy preferences.

TIP: Nonpartisan messages have been shown to be most effective for letters encouraging voting, and we strongly recommend against mentioning specific

policies (e.g. Medicare for All), current news (e.g. COVID-19), or voting methods (e.g. Vote by Mail) because something may change between the time you write your letters and the election. General topics that most people would agree with, like quality healthcare, good schools, and clean air and water, are fine to mention.

Crafting a nonpartisan "I vote because" message

When writing Vote Forward letters, you'll be completing the following sentence: *I vote because...*

Whether you're writing "vote by mail" or "please vote!" letters, it's important to keep your handwritten message nonpartisan, as nonpartisan messages work better than partisan messages. In this context, a partisan message is one that shows strong support for a particular candidate, party, or cause.

Below is the prompt for these letters, with examples of nonpartisan messages that would work well and partisan messages that would *not* work, with suggestions to make them nonpartisan. (Remember: Personal messages are the ones that come from your own unique experiences and perspective, so we recommend that you use the examples below as guidance when you craft your own message, rather than copying them directly onto your letter.)

I vote because:

Try these kinds of messages:

- I want to be part of history and participate in our democracy as a voter.
- I feel that it's extra important to speak up, particularly when our country is faced with challenges.
- I care about the future of our country, and I wanted to make my voice heard.

- I've always remembered how inspired I felt going to the polls with my Mom when I was a child.
- My vote is a way to create a better future for all of us, with good jobs, good healthcare, and safe communities.

Avoid these kinds of messages, or make them nonpartisan:

- I want to be part of a blue wave. (*Instead try*: I want to be part of a movement for change.)
- I couldn't live with myself if more Republicans win reelection. (*Instead try*: I want to elect leaders to represent all of us.)
- I want Democrats to win a majority in the Senate. (*Instead try*: I want representation for all of us.)
- We need to elect representatives who will ban fracking. (*Instead try*: We need representatives who care about our communities' health and well being.)

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