

# 3

# Being Your Own Advocate

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## 3.1 Being Assertive

### Why be assertive?

So you...

- ✓ Feel good about yourself – good self esteem
- ✓ Have better relationships with others
- ✓ Reach your goals
- ✓ Get things done
- ✓ Aren't taken advantage of
- ✓ Gain respect of others
- ✓ Protect your rights
- ✓ Take control of your life
- ✓ Let others know what you think, feel, need and want

# 3.1 Being Assertive

## Ways to be more assertive:

### Get ready

- ✓ Use positive body language – sit or stand straight and tall, head up, look people in the eye
- ✓ Have a confident tone of voice
- ✓ Practice
- ✓ Know what you want
- ✓ Ask for help if you need or want it
- ✓ Believe in yourself
- ✓ Take a deep breath

### Do it

- ✓ Don't apologise because your view is different to others
- ✓ Say "No" if you need to
- ✓ Use "I statements"
- ✓ Listen to others (see Are you Listening 3.2)

### Your turn:

- ✓ Be decisive – stick to your decision
- ✓ Stay calm – learn to deal with anger and emotion
- ✓ Have your say - Don't allow interruptions
- ✓ Repeat yourself if necessary
- ✓ Be reasonable – don't be unfair to others
- ✓

### Using "I statements"

Use an "I statement" to tell someone how you feel, without accusing the other person.

When you want to use an "I Statement" you say these things:

"I feel ..... " (what emotion do you feel?)

"when ..... " (what is causing the feeling?)

"and I would like ..... " (what outcome do you want?).

Instead of saying "Shut up, you're driving me insane!" (a "you statement") try saying "I feel annoyed when you won't stop singing and I'd rather than you went to your bedroom to sing"

I feel ..... (emotion)

when .....

..... (situation)

and I would like .....

..... (outcome).

I feel ..... (emotion)

when .....

..... (situation)

and I would like .....

..... (outcome).

## 3.2 Are you Listening?

One of the biggest problems self-advocates face is not being listened to. It can be frustrating to speak up and not be heard.

Tips to help ensure that you are more likely to be listened to:

### Listen

It might seem funny but when you make the effort to listen closely to others they are more likely to listen to you!

When you take the time to listen to others you will understand more about the situation.

- ✓ Let others have their say
- ✓ Try to see it from their point of view
- ✓ Ask them questions about what they are saying
- ✓ Use good body language – nod, “mirror” them
- ✓ Don’t interrupt
- ✓ Use eye contact – look them in the eyes, or look at their ears, forehead or chin

### Keep to the point

Plan what you want to say:

- ✓ What is the main message you want to get across? Remember your issue!
- ✓ What are the points you want to make?

### Communicate clearly

Use a clear voice that is loud enough to be heard.

If other ways to communicate help you, have them ready to use

Write up a list of your message and points – this will keep you on track but also make it easier for others to follow you

Use photos or video to support or tell your story

### Look like you should be listened to

Your body language should support your message. How you sit or stand tells people whether you are worth listening to or not.

Sit or stand up straight and tall. Feel confident. Keep your body language ‘open’ – don’t cross your arms across your body (this tells people to keep away). Look calm.

Look like you are listening to what others are saying – turn toward them and look at them

### Use support

It is ok to have a friend or supporter with you when you are speaking up.

You don’t have to, but if you would like to have someone with you go ahead and ask someone. Be sure to tell them what support you are expecting from them – should they speak or would you prefer they stay silent?

### Bring them back

If people get distracted and are talking about other things it’s OK to say something like

- ✓ “If we could get back to what we were talking about”
- ✓ or “Can we focus on the topic”

If people are talking over the top of you, you can use statements such as

- ✓ “if I can finish what I was saying...”
- ✓ Or “Please let me have my say”

### Tell them

If you are really struggling to get people to listen to you, it’s OK to tell them that it’s an issue for you. Think about what you would like from them instead and be sure to tell them that.



<http://www.headinjury.com/assertskills.html>  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaandersen/2012/04/27/3-simple-ways-to-get-people-to-listen-to-you/>

## 3.3 Making a Phone Call

### Making a Phone Call

- Communication over the phone is a quick and easy way to get answers to the questions or problems you may have.
- Planning your call will help you be clear, strong and confident.
- Writing notes of the conversation can help you concentrate on the conversation and remember what was said.

### Before you make the call:

Who do you need to call? Who is best to call?  
 Reason for the call: Why are you calling them, not someone else?  
 What's the issue? One short sentence to describe your issue.  
 What's the outcome? What results do you want?  
 Questions you want to ask: Keep it simple, about 3 questions.

### During the phone call:

Who are you speaking to? Write their name/s down.  
 Time and date of call: Record for future reference.  
 What they said to you: What did they tell you?  
 Do you need to make contact again? Have they asked you to call them back at another time or contact someone else?

Make copies of our Phone Record Sheet to use

### How to find contact numbers

#### Phone book

Your phone book can be the easiest place to look for numbers.

Surnames and company names are listed A to Z in the **white pages**.

In the **yellow pages** you will need to search by TYPE of company.

See the next page for details

#### White pages online

<http://www.whitepages.com.au/>

If you are searching for a business you can type the business name and suburb straight to search.

If you are looking for someone's home number you will need to click on the green residential tab and put their name and suburb in.



### Directory Assistance

1223 – automated assistance (free from home phone, charge from mobile phone)

12456 – call connect, operator assisted service (fees and charges apply)

### Citizens Advice Bureau

6248 8577

[www.citizensadvice.org.au](http://www.citizensadvice.org.au)

for information about the Canberra community.

### Internet

Use Google [www.google.com.au](http://www.google.com.au) or another search engine to find the number. Just type in the name of the organisation or person you are looking for.

### Using the Yellow Pages

For example if you are looking for a disability support organisation you would search the index at the front and find a listing for Disability Organisations:



## 3.3 Making a Phone Call

Then you would turn to the listed page – in this case 333 – to find all the organisations listed A to Z:



Topic Listing starts

## 3.4 Writing an email

Email can be a great way to communicate with other people, especially service providers and professionals.

### Benefits of writing an email:

- ✓ You can write it any time
- ✓ You can take your time writing it, even over days or weeks
- ✓ A written record can be handy
- ✓ Email is fast and cheap
- ✓ Each email can be sent to one person or many

Remember: Once you've pressed "send", you can't get it back so make sure your email is suitable to go!

### Important tips:

#### Who are you sending to?

Send only to the people who need to know or see your email. If you send it to everyone, no one will take responsibility.

#### Always double check:

Re-read what you've written before you press send. Save it as a draft and come back later to check it again.

Be sure your message is clear.

#### Keep your email short and to the point:

4 to 5 paragraphs are enough for most emails. Often people will not read a long email. Using headings or a summary at the top can help.

### Use the subject heading well:

A blank or unclear subject means your email might not be read.

Your subject should clearly tell the topic of your email.

For example: "An email from Jane" is an unclear subject, not telling you what the email is about. Subject headings such as "Meeting about problem with employer" or "Problem Regarding Staff and Privacy" are clear.



### Never write when angry or emotional:

It can be easy to write when upset, but not easy to write well - emotional emails can confuse or upset other people.

Take time to calm down and write your email, or come back to re-read.

Ensure you've included the facts, not just how you feel. You might like to have someone read it for you.

### Structuring an email:

An email is usually less formal than a letter. Emails should still include particular information.

## 3.4 Writing an email

**Greeting:**  
Hello <name>,  
Dear <name>,  
To whom it may concern, (if you don't

**To, Cc:**  
Use 'To' for the main person.  
Cc is for others you are sending to so they can see the email but it's not to them

**Subject:**  
Clear and informative

**Reason:**  
Explains why you are writing

**Main Point/s:**  
What do you want to say?  
What do you want them

**Signature:**  
Contains your details. Think about your privacy before using in a personal email- who is the email going to and do they need your personal information?

**Email Content:**  
From: Karen Hedley  
To: Training;  
Cc: team@advocacyforinclusion.org  
Subject: More about Nutrition and Self-advocacy course  
Hello Training Team,  
I am interested in finding out more about the Nutrition and Self-advocacy course in November.  
Could you please call me next Tuesday between 2 and 3pm, or email me with more information.  
Thank you,  
Karen  
Karen Hedley  
Training Officer  
M-Thu  
Advocacy for Inclusion is a member of the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia [www.dana.org.au](http://www.dana.org.au)  
Advocacy for Inclusion  
Phone: 61 2 6257 4005  
Fax: 61 2 6257 4006  
[karen@advocacyforinclusion.org](mailto:karen@advocacyforinclusion.org)  
[www.advocacyforinclusion.org](http://www.advocacyforinclusion.org)  
[twitter](#)  
02 Griffin Centre  
20 Genge St  
Canberra City ACT 2601  
improving life for people with disabilities

## 3.5 Writing a Letter

### Writing a Letter

Writing letters to people can be a great way to get your opinions noticed, provide feedback, or share information. Another great benefit to writing letters is that you can take your time and really think about and prepare what you are going to say.

### Who might I write to?

Some examples of who you might need to write a letter to:

- Family and Friends
- Government Departments

- Your local member of Parliament
- Doctors
- Community members/ businesses
- Carers/social workers

### What goes in a letter?

1. Your contact details – your address. You might like to include your email address or phone number as well
2. Contact details of the person you are writing to. You might need to make a phone call to find out who the best person is.

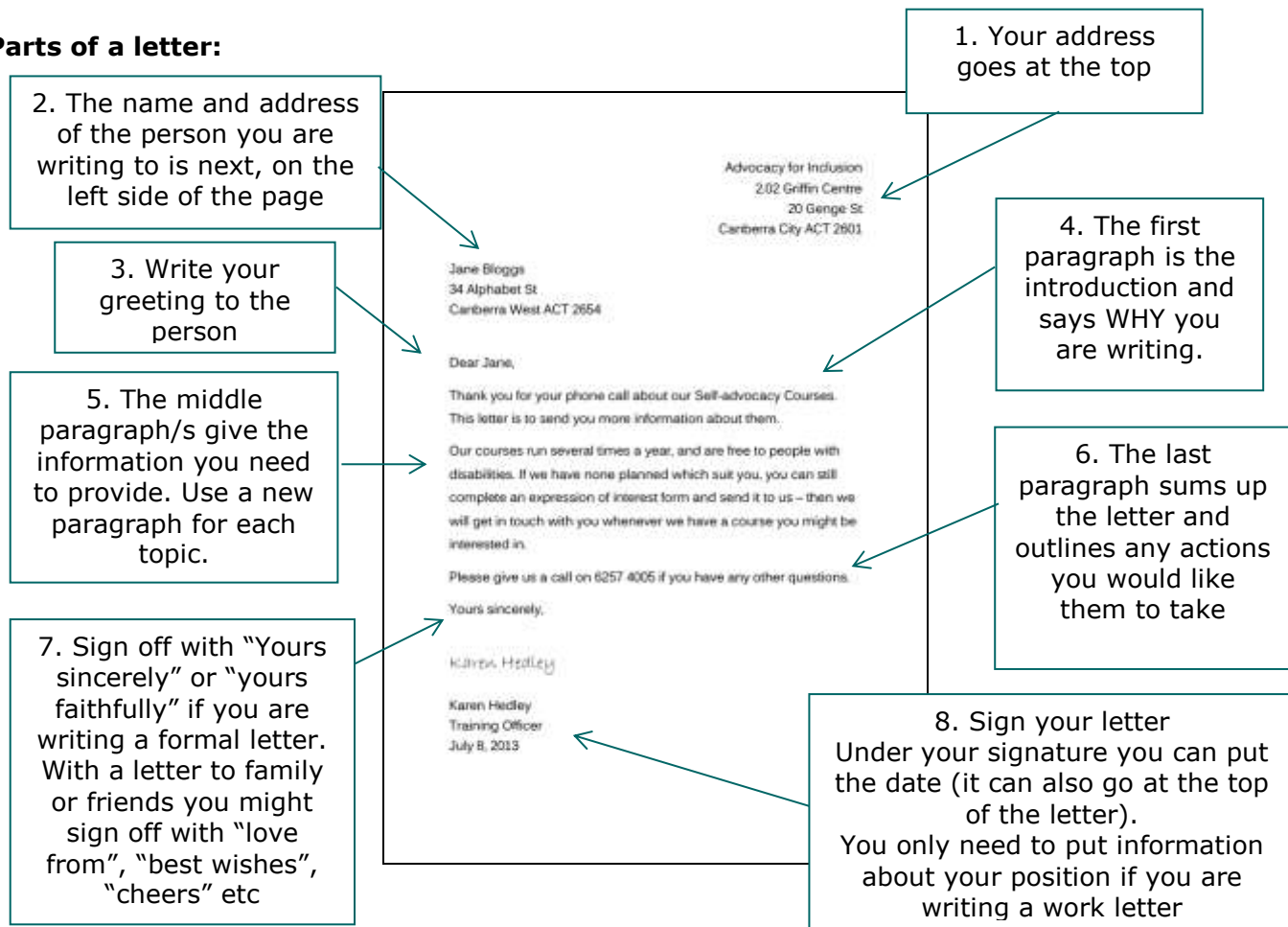
# 3.5 Writing a Letter

- The content of the letter – this could be clear, and concise (to the point):  
Before you start writing identify your issue/s: Use the Self-advocacy Step by Step plan (2.3) to help you work out what you are writing about. It’s also good to think about what actions or changes you would like made.

If you want to use dot points to make your letter shorter and clearer you can.

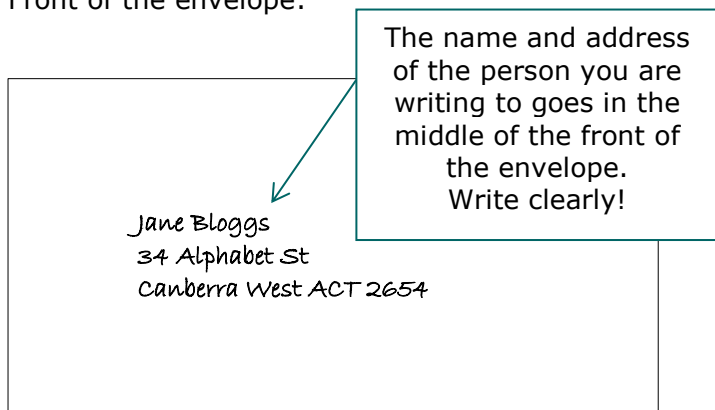
- If there is additional information to include you can add copies of other documents in with your letter (don’t send originals!). Mention you have included them and why.
- Make sure you sign and date your letter and keep a copy of it in your files.

### Parts of a letter:

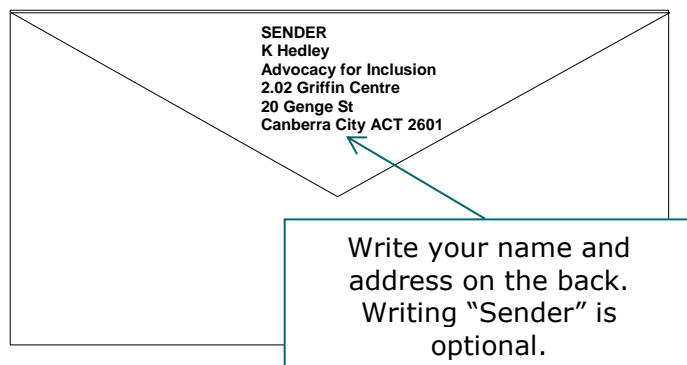


### Addressing an Envelope

Front of the envelope:



Back of the envelope:



## 3.6 Making a complaint

### Making a complaint

Sometimes you might not be happy with a service or product you have received. Providing feedback is always helpful to help others to improve what they are doing. Sometimes things might be so bad you might want to put in a formal complaint.

### Why complain?

There can be many reasons you might complain, including:

- Receiving poor quality service
- Being treated rudely or unfairly
- Having your privacy breached
- Poor accessibility

Complaining gives the other person or service the chance to find out about the problem in order to fix it or improve what they are doing.

### Who should I complain to?

Usually it's best to start with the person you are having the problem with, then work up the chain.

Don't forget that you are entitled to support throughout a complaint process. This could be from a family member, friend or advocate.

1. Talk to the person or people involved.  
If you have no success then...
2. Talk to the person's supervisor or manager.  
If you have no success then...
3. Check who is more senior and talk to them.  
You might do this by checking policies, asking those you've already spoken with, or asking others for advice

### How should I make my complaint?

#### 1. Identify your issue

Be clear about what has happened and what you want done about it. Use the 'Self-advocacy Step-by-Step Plan' (2.3) to help this process.

#### 2. Do your research

Do they have any policies that might support your complaint? Are there any laws, standards or human rights which might apply?

Find this out by looking on their website or asking others who might know.

#### 3. Find out how to complain

Find out what the complaint process is for the organisation, company or department. Do this by asking or looking on their website.

They may have a form for complaints that you can request or download.

#### 4. Make your complaint

Write out a draft (practice) complaint. Be sure to keep to the issues you identified. Have someone you trust read through it and give feedback before you send it. Make sure it is clear and stick to the point.

You might choose to complain by:

- Using a complaint form
- Making a phone call (see 3.2 for more)
- Writing a letter (see 3.4 for more)
- Writing an email (see 3.3 for more)

#### 5. Keep records

Keep copies and notes of everything. You may need to know details at a later date and will be able to refer to your notes. Keep them together in a safe place

#### 6. Take it further if needed

If you are not happy with the result of your complaint you may be able to take it further. There might be an external complaint process (outside the service, or department) or an appeal process.

It is likely you will receive a written response to your complaint, and should be told what the next steps are if you are not happy. If not consider asking an advocacy agency or other people who may be able to help.

## 3.6 Preparing for a Meeting

It can be confronting to attend and participate in meetings but they can be very productive. Here are some tips and tricks to help you participate effectively.

### Why meetings?

- Get a group of people together and tell your story once
- Save time



## 3.6 Preparing for a Meeting

- Have your say
- Everyone will have the same understanding of your issue

### Tips and Tricks

#### 1. Be prepared

Be clear about your issue and what you want done about it. Use the 'Self-advocacy Step-by-Step Plan' (2.3) to get ready.

Plan any questions you might like to ask.

Talk to others and get their input. Ask a friend to come with you if you want support.

#### 2. Make the meeting suitable

Be sure the meeting is organised for a day and time that suits you as well as the others attending.

If the meeting is about you it's OK to insist it's at a day or time that suits you (and your friend or supporter).

Tell meeting organisers about any accessibility needs you have.

#### 3. Take what you need

Take your Self-advocacy Step-by-Step Plan (2.3) and list of questions.

Take copies of any important documents, including records of any other important communication.

Take a friend or supporter with you if needed.

#### 4. Participate effectively

Stick to the point of the meeting.

Don't take over the meeting, let others have their say. Listen to what others have to say.

### Notes

✍

Acknowledge what they've said even if you don't agree.

If others interrupt, take over or talk about unimportant things, it's OK to ask them to let you finish or get back to the point. For example:

- ✓ "If we could get back to what we were talking about"
- ✓ or "Can we focus on the topic"

If people are talking over the top of you, you can use statements such as

- ✓ "if I can finish what I was saying..."
- ✓ Or "Please let me have my say"

#### 5. Record

Take notes during the meeting (or ask your friend or supporter to). You might take note of what is discussed, what is agreed or who will do what after the meeting.

If official notes or minutes are taken ask for have a copy.

#### 6. Alternatives

If you find meetings impossible ask if there is something else that can be done, for instance:

- Meet with one person only
- Have them come to you
- Talk over the phone or via the computer / internet
- Discuss issues by email
- Ask a 'proxy' to attend (someone who attends on your behalf)

# 3.7 Making a Complaint

When you have a problem in your life it can make it very difficult to enjoy your work and keep working hard. If you're having a problem check out our step by step guide to lead you through working it out.

**AT ANY TIME:**  
**Seek advice**  
 Talk to someone you trust, such as a friend, family, or your advocate.  
 Work out how much help or support you need from them and let them know.

**What's the problem?**  
 Identify the problem – look at:  
 Who, what, where, why, what do you know, how do you feel, what do you want or need?  
 2.3 Step by Step Plan might help you to analyse the issue

**AT ANY TIME:**  
 You can contact Advocacy for Inclusion for advice or to ask for advocacy help.  
 6257 4005 || info@advocacyforinclusion.org  


**Talk**  
 Talk to the person or people involved  
 Tell them how you feel and what your needs and wants are  
 Solved?

**Talk more**  
 Talk to someone higher up such as a supervisor or boss, or to someone who knows more than you..  
 Solved?

**Extra help**  
 If you can't sort things out with the people you're talking to, you might need to talk to someone outside the situation.  
 4.2 Who can I talk to has suggestions for who to talk to, depending on what your problem is.  
 Solved?

**Official process**  
 Check if there is a policy or process you should follow. Policies might include:

- Complaints or grievance policy
- Bullying policy

There might also be a contract or agreement that might tell you more.

**Solved**  
 Congratulations on being a strong self-advocate!  


**Not solved**  
 If you aren't able to solve this problem you still have options...

Change situation

Accept situation

Try again