

3 Parliament and the government

3c Contacting your MP

Type of activity

Writing a formal email to an MP. Individual and pair work.

AECC reference

Wt/E3.1a, Wt/E3.2a, Ws/E3.1a

Aim

To practise summary and formal letter writing.

Language

expressing personal difficulties and requesting help;
 present simple and present perfect tenses

Vocabulary

a surgery, a community centre, a crèche, a facility,
 a closure

Preparation

Make one copy of the worksheet for each learner.
 Option: for the Warmer a mini-questionnaire could be prepared by the teacher on IT skills for learners to discuss in pairs or small groups.

Differentiation

Weaker learners: weaker learners work together and choose one of the problems to discuss and write notes about (procedure 3).

Stronger learners: stronger learners work together and make notes on the problems suggested in the worksheet or choose an issue of their own to work on.

Warmer

Ask learners about their IT skills. Have they got a computer at home? How good are their computer skills? Do they often send emails? How important is it to have computer skills in the world today? (A mini-questionnaire could be prepared by the teacher on IT skills for learners to discuss in pairs or small groups.)

- 1 Tell learners they are going to practise writing an email to their MP. Give out a copy of the worksheet to each learner and discuss the introductory questions. (This is an opportunity to compare systems in different countries as learners may not realise that you can see an MP personally in the UK.)
- 2 Read the introductory paragraph and the notes written by Leila, a young woman from Turkey, about her particular problem with her children's crèche. Ask comprehension questions to check understanding.
- 3 Learners work in small groups. Ask them to read the two problems. The weaker learners discuss and write notes about one of these problems. Stronger learners discuss both problems and choose one to write notes about. Or, they can choose an issue of their own to write about.
- 4 As a group, look at the email writing frame and read the introductory paragraph. (Look at the structure and layout of a genuine email if learners are unfamiliar with emails and their symbols.)
- 5 Ask learners if the style of writing is formal or informal. (Not all emails are informal and this is written in more

formal language. Highlight the lack of contractions as an example.)

- 6 Learners complete the information gap fill using information from Leila's notes. Go over the answers as a group. Review the use of the present perfect simple, referring to the examples in the email (*have lived in / have had a problem with*) and contrast with the time concept of the present simple, if required (e.g. *I live in Sheffield now. I have lived in Sheffield for four years.*)

Example answers

Leila Tekin / Turkey / Sheffield / four years / the crèche (or, the closure of our crèche) / the council want to shut the crèche. My children stay there when I go to English classes ... / write to the council about this. / as possible. / hearing from you. / sincerely,

- 7 Learners work in pairs or individually on writing their own email. Depending on the level of the group, learners exchange emails to read or, if computers are available, send to each other.

Extension

Learners role-play the meeting between the constituents and the MP and secretary. Constituents can prepare what they would like to say and actions to be taken, and MPs plan their questions for the meeting and check they have the facts down correctly.

Answers: Self-study exercises

- 1 1 Has the Prime Minister met the local people?
 2 Have they visited the Houses of Parliament?
 3 Have you had a problem with the council?
 4 Have we sent them an email?
 5 Has Ana contacted her MP?
 6 Has Mrs Jones made an appointment?
- 2 1 Yours faithfully 2 I look forward to your reply
 3 Dear Madam / Sir 4 Palace of Westminster
 5 15 Church Road 6 Dear Mr Smith 7 Northern
 Ireland 8 22nd July

Contacting your MP**Your own notes**

Contacting your MP **3c**

In groups, discuss the following questions.

- Why do people write to their Members of Parliament?
- What sort of problems do you think an MP can help you with?
- How can you get in contact with your MP?

Contacting your MP

If you need to make an appointment to see your local MP to discuss something serious, it's a good idea to write to them first and explain about your problem so they can investigate it before you meet.

Leila Tekin is Turkish and has lived in Sheffield, in the UK, for four years. Read the notes that she has written below. Who does she have a problem with? What is the problem? What does she want her MP to do?

1	The problem you want to discuss with your MP:	<i>The council want to shut the crèche at our local community centre, in Sheffield.</i>
2	The details of the problem:	<i>I go to English classes at the Community Centre because there's a free crèche, where my children can stay when I'm in class. The council won't give the crèche any more money, and it will have to shut next month.</i>
3	The action you want your MP to take:	<i>I'd like my MP to write to the council and tell them we need this facility or we can't go to English classes any more! They must keep it open!</i>

In groups, discuss the following problems. Make notes on the action you want your MP to take.

- You want your elderly parents to visit you but they can't get a visa for the UK.
- Your friend can't get her deaf son a place in a special school.

Writing an email

The email 'writing frame' below will help you plan your writing. Read through the text and fill in the information about Leila.

To: holmesp@parliament.uk
 Cc: LJTekin@hotmail.com
 Subject: Local crèche closure

Dear Mr Holmes,

My name is and I am from

I have lived in for

Recently I have had a problem with Sheffield Council about The difficulty is that

I am writing to you to ask you if you could

I would like to make an appointment to discuss this matter as soon

I look forward to

Yours,
 Mrs Leila Tekin

Write a draft of an email, using the notes you produced from problem a or b.