

Constructing a letter or note to the neighbour

The same general rules apply when writing a note or letter to your neighbour, as when approaching them to speak directly (*see information sheet on Assertive Communication*).

- be polite and conciliatory in tone
- keep to the facts, and keep it clear and simple
- explain why it is a problem for you, and the effects it has had on you
- don't bring in other issues or past history to 'prove' a point
- don't assign blame, or assume bad intentions on the part of the neighbour
- be careful not to exaggerate
- state what you would like to have happen, and invite them to respond to your concerns with their own ideas
- don't issue threats, ultimatums or say what you will do if they don't agree to what you ask
- have a read through what you have written and think about how you would feel if you had received this. Do you want to change anything?
- Make sure you have not written in the heat of the moment. If you have, wait until you are calmer before re-reading it and especially before posting it through your neighbour's letterbox.

How you compose the letter or note will depend on your previous relationship and how well you know them. If you don't know them, or hardly know them, you need to introduce yourself. For example:

Dear Mr / Ms -----

I'm afraid we haven't had chance to meet one another properly yet so please forgive my contacting you by means of this note / letter.

I hope you won't mind if I mention that when you had visitors on Saturday night, we couldn't get to sleep until about 2:30 in the morning. We have small children and are usually up at 6:00 in the morning, so we need our sleep. We don't at all mind your having visitors, but would prefer it if you are able to keep the noise down after 11:00 p.m. I hope that would be OK for you; please let us know how you feel about this.

With best wishes,

John and Janet ----- at Flat 4.

If you do know your neighbours, but feel uncomfortable going round to see them in person, you could write an informal note / letter:

Dear Dave,

I hope you don't mind my mentioning this, but when you let the dogs out first thing in the morning and last thing at night, they always bark and wake me up. It's a problem for me because I'm a light sleeper anyway and I need to be on the ball for my job as a primary teacher. It's worse at weekends when I could really do with a lie in till 8:00 a.m. at least. I would really appreciate your thoughts on this, as I'd like to find a way forward that would work for us both.

Best wishes,

Doreen

Note that in both letters, the writer has left the door open for the other person to respond with their own thoughts and ideas – they are not ‘telling’ the other person what to do. This is a negotiation, so be prepared for compromise and some give and take. Or it may be that the problem just does not reoccur – your letter was enough and has given the neighbour pause for thought and they have responded positively and taken steps to resolve the problem.

If, however, the problem does continue, at least you have made the first approaches carefully and in a conciliatory manner. You can go back to the assessor to report on progress, or lack of it, and he / she will be able to discuss your other options with you.