

6 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR YOUR NEXT PETITION

Whether arguing for tougher laws against animal cruelty or more aid money to alleviate poverty, championing women's equality, or saving the environment, each and every petition campaign requires a compelling call to action.

At its most basic, a call to action is what you are asking signers to do... and why. Your call to action will generally appear in the title of your petition and in the petition summary.

In our experience – and based on years of research in marketing and psychology – the most effective calls to action contain these six essential elements:

1. **A verb.**
2. **A target.**
3. **An expected outcome.**
4. **A theory of change.**
5. **A sense of urgency.**
6. **Reader-centered language.**

In this article, we hope to lay out some of the essential elements you can use to create a compelling call to action for your next petition. Along the way, you'll find practical tips on language choices, title structures, and other components for effective calls to action.

A call to action is what you are asking signers to do... and why.



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION HAVE A **VERB**.

What is the action you want the reader to take? Without a verb, the reader has no clear sense of agency or role in your campaign.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong Tell Congress to Stop Pay Discrimination Against Women

weaker Pay Discrimination is Wrong

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

strong You can help ensure equal pay. Send a message to your Member of Congress now and urge her or him to support the Lilly Ledbetter Fair

weaker Congress needs to act on equal pay.



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION HAVE A **TARGET**.

The most effective petitions tell readers who they are trying to influence... and, in the summary, why.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong

Tell Prime Minister Cameron and Parliament to Help Save Lives in Syria

weaker

Syria in Crisis

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

strong

The UK has committed to help fund humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees. Now it is time for Parliament to make good on that promise.

Every day we wait results in incalculable suffering and misery. Please sign this petition today and urge your MP and Prime Minister David Cameron to fully fund relief efforts for the men, women, and children who have been forced to flee the crisis in Syria.

weaker

Sign the petition today and show that you stand with the men, women, and children who are suffering as a result of the crisis in Syria.



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION HAVE AN **EXPECTED OUTCOME**.

Readers need to know the end goal for the action — not just the what, but also the why.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong

Save Polar Bear Homes from Harmful Drilling

weaker

Polar Bear Habitat at Risk

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

strong

You can be a polar bear hero. Urge President Obama to save vital habitat for these beloved bears from an inevitable oil spill.

weaker

Be a polar bear hero — sign the petition today!



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION HAVE A THEORY OF CHANGE.

While not strictly necessary within a petition's title, each petition summary must contain a call to action with a credible theory of change.

Put simply, the most effective petitions provide a reasonable explanation as to why a reader's action (generally providing their email, phone, or address) will lead to the promised outcome.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong

Tell Prime Minister Harper to Boost Funding for Life-Saving Cancer Research.

weaker

Stop the Scourge of Cancer.

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

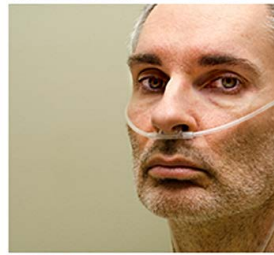
strong

The more people who join our movement, the more pressure we can bring to bear on the prime minister and Parliament to increase funding for life-saving cancer research.

Sign our petition and tell Canadian leaders to step up their efforts advance research to end cancer.

weaker

Help us cross out cancer. Sign up now.



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION CONVEY A SENSE OF URGENCY.

In a world of competing priorities, effective calls to action clearly demonstrate why the reader should respond now, as opposed to some later date.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong

Stop Paul Ryan's 11th-Hour Attack on Working Families.

weaker

Join the Fight for Working Families.

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

strong

Congressman Paul Ryan's budget would make life tougher for millions of families, and Congress is voting on it as soon as this week!

Take a stand for working Americans. Send your message to Congress right now.

weaker

Take a stand for working Americans. Send your message to Congress right now.



COMPELLING CALLS TO ACTION USE **READER-CENTERED LANGUAGE**.

Just because something matters to the writer doesn't mean that it matters to the reader. Effective calls to action personally resonate with readers by drawing on commonly shared experiences or sensory input.

TITLE EXAMPLES

strong

Tell the FDA that Your Family Deserves Safer Spinach.

weaker

Make Spinach Safer

PETITION SUMMARY EXAMPLES

strong

The spinach you buy at your local store may contain stomach-sickening bacteria. Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to set clear standards that would limit that bacteria and reduce food-borne illnesses.

You deserve food that won't make you or your family sick. Tell the Food and Drug Administration you want clear limits on harmful bacteria and rigorous enforcement of these standards to ensure that your family stays healthy

weaker

Much of the spinach in grocery stores contains stomach-sickening bacteria. Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to set clear standards to limit that bacteria and reduce food-borne illnesses.

Food safety is vital for public health. Please send a message now.

