

Sharing Your Story for a Political Purpose

This presentation is based on ASAN's new toolkit "Sharing Your Story for a Political Purpose."

You can find it at www.autisticadvocacy.org



Sharing your story



Your story is when you talk about your life.

You can also talk about things that you have seen, or people that you know, if they say it is okay.

Your story doesn't have to share everything about your life. Only share the parts of your story that you want to share.

Sharing your story

The point of sharing your story is **not** to “inspire” others.

Sharing your story is a political tool.



Why share your story?

Many people who work in the government get **elected** (chosen by everyday people).

Elected officials are supposed to listen to the problems that everyday people have, and make policies to solve problems.

Elected officials should think about what policies people want, and help make those policies. If they don't, they might not get elected again.

Why share your story?

Elected officials have to think about a lot of different problems. They have to choose which problems to work on.

When someone shares their story, it can make a big difference.

Hearing a real person talk about a problem gives elected officials a name and face to remember. It makes the problem seem more “real” to them.

Why share your story?

Your story gives decision-makers a reason to make the changes you want.



How do I make people remember my story?

Is your advocacy story:

Short and Direct?

Personal to you?

Have enough details?

Show a problem is big?



Sharing your story for advocacy: what to include

1. Name and where you live (city and/or state).
2. The bill, law or policy you'll talk about.
3. The problem.
4. Why that problem is important to you.
5. How that problem affects your life.
6. How this problem affects other people.
7. Ways the problem can be fixed.
8. End with an ask (a question or request).



Example: I want more funding for buses in Example City

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Ways to Share Your Story

There are many places where you can share your story. We talked about some of these places in the “They Work For Us” toolkit:

- Calling your elected officials
- Meeting in person with your elected officials
- Emailing or writing letters to your elected officials
- Using social media to connect with your elected officials

You can find this toolkit at www.autisticadvocacy.org

Ways to Share Your Story

“Sharing Your Story for a Political Purpose” talks about more ways to use your story to make change:

- In a Petition
- In an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor
- At a Town Hall meeting
- In Legislative Testimony
- During a Public Comment Period

Petitions

A **petition** is a letter that asks a target to do something.

People sign a petition to show that they want the person or group to do that thing.

The more names a petition gets, the more powerful it can be.



What are good goals for a petition?

- 1) To make the target pay attention to a problem
- 2) To make other people pay attention to a problem
- 3) To make the news pay attention to a problem

There are 2 different kinds of petitions:
Paper and Online.



Paper petitions

The good:

Delivering a handwritten petition in-person makes a big impact!

The bad:

It can be harder to get signatures.



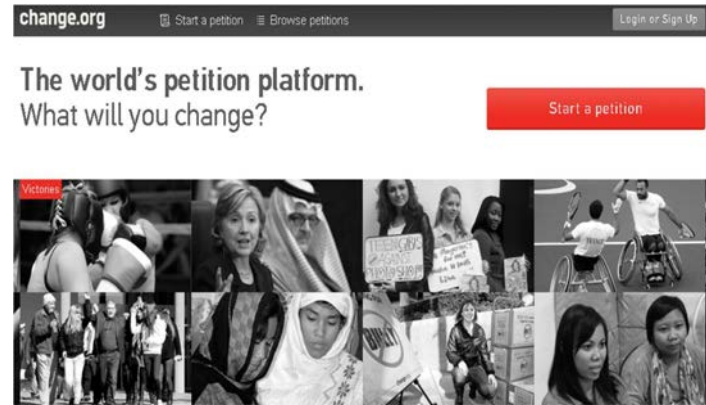
Online petitions

The good:

An online petition can reach more people than a paper petition.

The bad:

There are lots of petitions online, so people (including your target) may not care about yours.



Steps to make a petition

- 1) Choose your target and demands. Make sure they are listed at the top of your petition, and that they are specific and realistic.
- 2) Tell your advocacy story - why are your demands important?
- 3) Choose what kind of petition you want (paper or online)
- 4) Spread the word about your petition
- 5) Deliver your petition!



What makes a good petition?

- Are my target and demands specific and realistic?
- Is my story short and simple?
- Does my story show why the problem in my petition is important?
- Does the kind of petition (online or paper) make sense?
- Do I have a plan for how I will spread the word about my petition?
- What is the number of signatures I want?
- Can I get that many signatures? How will I do that?



Examples

- 1) I want more buses in my town. I use an online petition to ask the President to make sure my town gets more buses.

Is this a good petition or a bad petition? Why?

- 2) I want more buses in my town. I use a paper petition and ask people who live in my town to sign it. The petition asks the city council to pass a law that will buy more buses for the town.

Is this a good petition or a bad petition? Why?

Letters to the Editor

You can write about a problem or policy and have your opinion published in the newspaper!

A **letter to the editor** is a kind of written news story that shares the opinions of everyday people who don't work in the news.

People write letters to the editor for newspapers, magazines, or websites. These letters are usually about problems that have already been in the news.

Every newspaper has different rules about letters to the editor.

Op-eds

People who don't work in the news can also write op-eds for newspapers.

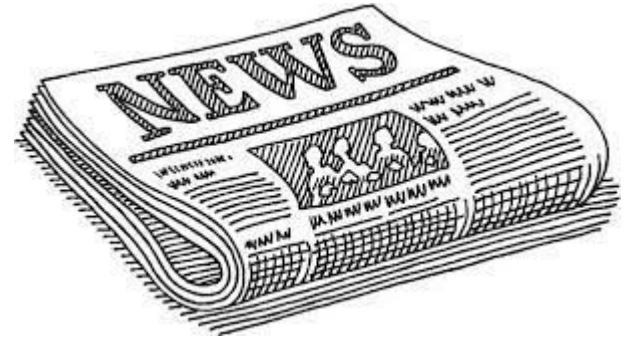
An **op-ed** is an essay that gives your opinion.

There is a website, <http://www.theopedproject.org>, with a list of the op-ed and letter to the editor rules for over 100 news websites. It also has some tips on how to write a good op-ed or letter to the editor.

Why write op-eds or letters to the editor?

Elected officials and policymakers keep track of local news in the area they represent.

Your op-eds and letters to the editor can also make a difference by letting more people know about an issue that is important to you.



Town Hall Meetings

Government workers and elected officials hold **town hall meetings** to hear from everyday people.

2 types of town hall meetings:

- General (to talk about any problem or bill/law)
- Specific (to talk about one problem or bill/law)



What should I expect at a Town Hall meeting?

Many people usually come to Town Hall meetings. You may not get much time to talk.

Plan ahead – have an elevator speech ready!

End your speech with a question.



Elevator Speeches

An **elevator speech** is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an advocacy target, like riding the elevator with them.

The format of an elevator speech is similar to the structure of any other advocacy story, but it should only be 30 seconds – 1 minute long!



Legislative Testimony

Legislative means something is about a law, or the process of making laws.

Testimony is when you talk about your experience or what you know.

Legislative testimony is when you use your experience or what you know, to talk about how a law would affect you or your community.

Legislative Testimony

Groups of lawmakers have meetings called **hearings** to learn more about a bill before they vote on it to become law.

This is a chance for you to give **legislative testimony**, and tell lawmakers about how a law would affect you.



What should be in my testimony?

1. Your name and where you are from.
2. The name and number of the bill.
3. What you think about the bill.
4. Sum up your main points in one sentence at the end.
5. Thank the legislators for listening to you.



How should I prepare for a hearing?

Print out copies of your testimony to give to lawmakers.

Arrive early to the hearing to sign up to testify.



During the hearing

You will testify in front of a group.

After your testimony, lawmakers may ask you questions.

Even if you sign up for a spot to give testimony, time may run out before you can.



Public comment periods

After a law is passed, the government needs to figure out how the law will be put into action.

These decisions are called **regulations**.

People give their opinions on regulations during a **public comment period**.



More about public comments

Public comments are submitted online. Usually, people have 60 days to submit comments.

You can submit your comments by going to [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) and looking up the name of the law.



Where can I find chances to advocate?

- Websites of elected officials
- Websites of nonprofit organizations
- Newspapers (in print or online)
- Your state's Developmental Disabilities Council, Protection and Advocacy organization, or other disability rights organizations



Putting it all together

Think of an advocacy goal you have.

How could you share your story to help make this goal happen?

How could you use some of the tools we talked about in this presentation?

- Petition
- Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor
- Comment at a Town Hall meeting
- Legislative Testimony
- Public Comment on a Regulation



Resources

Civic Engagement Toolbox for Self-Advocates

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/civic/>

Sharing Your Story for a Political Purpose

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/sharing/>

PADSA Resource Guides

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/padsa/>

Thanks for listening! Any questions?



The Autistic Self Advocacy Network

<http://autisticadvocacy.org/>

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