

TESTIFYING BEFORE CONGRESS

I'VE BEEN INVITED TO TESTIFY...NOW WHAT?

If you've ever seen a movie or television show set on Capitol Hill, you've probably seen a hearing – the reality is very different. The Office of Federal Relations is here to help. Unlike Hollywood, House and Senate hearings are typically staid affairs. Federal Relations has extensive experience helping UW faculty and staff prepare hearings and communicate with Congressional staff. We will accompany you to the hearing and give you guidance both before and after testifying and we are happy to help answer any questions you have about the process.

YOUR TESTIMONY

Congratulations! If you are asked to testify before a Congressional committee, it is because you have a sound knowledge of your subject, and Congress wants to hear your expert opinion. Although you may be nervous, remember that these officials are looking to you for information and guidance. Relax, remain calm and speak like the expert you are.

There are **two distinct parts** to delivering your testimony. First, there is the testimony itself. Expressing what you want to say comes in two types: **written and oral testimony**. Both are very valuable, and official, but have slightly different functions. See guidance on testimony to the right. Federal Relations is happy to provide examples of other witness testimony (both in topic and format) as a guide.

Second part of testifying is **answering questions** at the hearing. The questions are typically based on what is in your testimony and the hearing topic but can deviate to anything on the policymaker's mind. In addition to questions at the hearing, you can also receive Questions for the Record (QFRs). QFRs come after the hearing and you have several weeks to respond in writing.



Elements of Testimony

> There are a few content items to keep in mind for any successful testimony:

- Standard, formal header and introduction.
- Introduce yourself.
- State your goals and outline your major points.
- Talk about the problem.
- Talk about your specific efforts (or UW's efforts) to resolve the problem. Describe solutions that are being tried or considered. Statistics are important but examples on how this impacts their constituents is singularly powerful.
- Focus on what Congress can do to help solve the problem.

Written Testimony

This goes into the **Congressional Record** and is distributed to Members and staff prior to the hearing.

It is not academic writing. It may be of any length – we recommend **no more than 12 pages total**. It can be footnoted, or end noted, but no citations are necessary.

Committees typically require **both electronic and hard copies** at least a day prior to the hearing. Federal Relations can print and deliver the hard copies if requested.

CV should be no more than 10 pages.

Oral Testimony

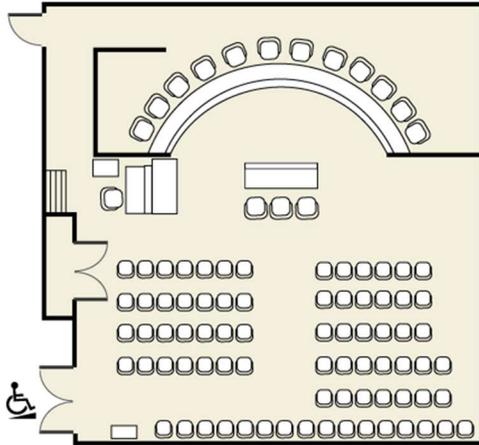
> Think of this as an executive summary of your written testimony – a high level overview. It is to summarize your written testimony. This also goes into the **Congressional Record** as part of the hearing transcript.

The oral testimony should be no more than **three pages** long, **double spaced**. You will only have **five minutes** to speak, and it goes quickly.

Please practice before you testify.

WHERE DO I SIT? WHAT DO I DO?

A typical hearing is a fluid event and will not have all the members of the committee or subcommittee attendance for the duration. Members and staff constantly move through room. There is typically a photographer moving around taking pictures. The audience shuffles. There is a lot of movement and noise that you never see on television.



Each hearing room is slightly different either in size, theme or grandeur. That said, all rooms will consist of a **dais** (where the Members of Congress or Senators sit and face the witnesses and audience) a **witness table** facing the Members (where those testifying sit), and a space for **audience** behind the witnesses.

The committee or subcommittee Chair will sit in the center. The Ranking Member (the most senior person on the Committee from the party in the Minority) will sit next to the Chair. From the witness's perspective, Republicans sit on the right and Democrats sit on the left. Congressional staff sit behind the Members along the walls. There will be a court reporter taking a transcript of the proceedings.

As a witness, you will be seated at the witness table facing the legislators. There are typically three to five witnesses at each hearing. There will be a name placard indicating where you will sit, and in front of you will be a thin, adjustable microphone attached to a brown box. The box will have a button to work the microphone, a timer, and a set of lights. Typically, there is also a bottle of water, a pad of paper, and a pen. Please feel free to use any of the items. Prior to the hearing, Federal Relations will help determine the order of the witnesses.

The Chair and Ranking Member, as well as any committee members present, will have the opportunity to offer opening remarks. These will set the tone for the hearing and frame the discussion.

When your oral testimony begins, **you will have 5 minutes to speak**. Additionally, the clock will start to count down and a **green light** will come on. When the counter is down to 30 seconds, a **yellow light** will come on - you need to start your conclusion. When the **red light** comes on, your time is up, and you need to stop.

After all witnesses have presented, the legislators have five minutes to ask questions. Policymakers can ask any witness any question. It is at the Member's discretion whom and what to ask, and not everyone will get a question.

Be aware that legislators may ask questions to help reinforce their own opinions. Most questions are meant to help you make a better case or explain something that was confusing. Answer questions briefly and stick to the topic of the question and what you know. If you do not know the answer, just say so, but offer to find the information and provide it to the committee.

OTHER THINGS TO REMEMBER

Policymakers, especially Members of Congress, often vote daily on many issues – everything from water projects to military readiness. While you do not want to talk down to them (and they probably know more than you think), you should not assume that they know all that you do about the issue at hand. Committee members are not experts. You're the expert, and that's why you're there.

Do not get drawn into partisan arguments. Stick to your areas of expertise. Similarly, you should not plan on telling them everything you know about the topic. Rather, focus on the problem and the ways the federal government can or should act. Don't spend more time describing your own qualifications or your programs than you do the issue at hand. Try to refrain from jargon, including acronyms, or overly specific and scientific terminology if possible. Keep it simple. Know your funding line.

Remember, public officials are people, too.

SMILE!

ALL COMMITTEES BROADCAST AND ARCHIVE HEARINGS ON THEIR WEBSITES.

IF YOU ARE SPEAKING, YOU ARE ON CAMERA!