

Prof. GALLAI

'OMG This Is Wrong!' Retired English Teacher Marks Up a White House Letter and Sends It Back

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/27/us/politics/trump-letter-english-teacher.html>

The notes were sprawled across a letter bearing President Trump's signature.

In the top left corner: "Have y'all tried grammar & style check?"

At the top right: "Federal is capitalized only when used as part of a proper noun."

And toward the bottom: "OMG this is WRONG!"

The letter, dated May 3 and printed on White House stationery, was addressed to Yvonne Mason, 61, a former high school English teacher who retired last year but hadn't quite left "grading-paper mode," she said on Sunday.

So when she received the letter in the mail, she pulled out her go-to purple pen and started making corrections. Then she snapped a picture, posted the letter on Facebook and mailed it back to the White House.

"It was a poorly worded missive," she said. "Poor writing is not something I abide. If someone is capable of doing better, then they should do better."

Ms. Mason, a Democrat who lives in Atlanta, had written to Mr. Trump to ask that he visit each family of those who died in the shooting that killed 17 people at a school in Parkland, Fla., in February.

"I had written to them in anger, to tell you the truth," she said. "I thought he owed it to these grieving families."

The letter she received did not address her concerns, she said. Instead, it listed a series of actions taken after the shooting, like listening sessions, meetings with lawmakers and the STOP School Violence Act, a bill that would authorize \$500 million over 10 years for safety improvements at schools but had no provisions related to guns.

There was more, but she didn't correct everything. "I did not mention the dangling modifier," she said. "I focused mainly on mechanics."

"Nation" was capitalized, so was "states." Ms. Mason circled both.

However, a style manual for the federal government calls for capitalizing "Nation" and "Federal" when the words are used as a synonym for the United States. It says "State" should be capitalized when it is referring to the government or legislature. In letters from Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush that constituents posted online, words like "Nation" and "President" are capitalized.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The letter stood in contrast to other letters she has received from politicians, Ms. Mason said. Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, sent "beautiful" letters that struck a tone that "makes me more important than him," she said.

She has written to several legislators in South Carolina, where she taught Advanced Placement English language and composition.

Following up on a New Year's resolution, she has written a postcard to the White House every day since Jan. 1, she said.

When she was teaching, she wanted to show her students that their voices mattered, even if they weren't old enough to vote, she said.

"You're important. You need to be a part of this, you need to pay attention to what's going on," she said.

When word spread about the corrected letter she had sent to the White House, Ms. Mason received hundreds of messages from people across the country — some positive (a lawyer in Houston wanted to know if she would be interested in looking over his appellate briefs) and others venomous (one person suggested she "must be a lonely bitter hag with a lot of cats").

But Ms. Mason wasn't focusing on the negativity.

"Let them have their day, bless their little hearts," she said. "They aren't changing my mind."