Tip Category	Effective Approach	Common Pitfall to Avoid
How Your Message is Conveyed in a CEQA Comment Letter		
Format and Size	• Use a format and size that is straightforward and simple, and one that won't distract from the message you want to deliver. • Comment letters can be submitted via snail mail or e-mail, as well as delivered at public meetings and hearings.	• Use of template/boilerplate letters and postcards only indicate the controversial nature of the project. • Commonly repeated environmental issues will only generate a single, common "master" response for each issue by the lead agency.
Tone	• Use a neutral tone, avoid slang, and stay focused on the project, its environmental issues, and the analysis contained within the CEQA document.	• Don't demonize, insult, or complain about the project itself or the lead agency. CEQA does not judge whether a project is "good" or "bad." • Don't go off track and discuss lead agency problems not associated with the project.
Project Title and State Clearinghouse Number	• Include the full title of the project in the subject line/top of page, along with its State Clearinghouse Number (SCH#).	• Leaving off this information may result in the letter getting "lost" at the lead agency.
Writing Style	• Use a style that is easiest for you, but be concise and consistent in your comments and overall message. • Begin with your major comments, next give specific examples for each of those major comments, and then end with your message to the agency. • List your questions, concerns, information, etc. by separate categories with headings. Cite the CEQA document's page number, paragraph, and/or line when providing your comments.	• Don't ramble and be disorganized. Your important points may get lost in poorly worded sentences. An agency unable to decipher a comment can ignore it. Pontification may feel good, but it is not a basis for evidence in a CEQA lawsuit.
New Information	• Provide copies of letters, photos, digital files, and/or documents that you believe support your concerns, as attachments to the comment letter, if the agency did not cite them or use them in their CEQA analyses.	• Not providing a copy of your supporting documentation to the agency will allow the agency to ignore your comment. It also weakens your message/evidence within the context of a CEQA lawsuit.

Tip Category	Effective Approach	Common Pitfall to Avoid
The Message You Want to Express in a CEQA Comment Letter		
Understanding the Purpose of a Review and Evaluation of a CEQA Document	• Before you begin to write that letter, know that the reasons for the review are to: (1) share expertise, (2) disclose the agency's analyses, (3) check for accuracy, (4) detect omissions, (5) discover public concerns, and (6) solicit counter proposals.	• Making generalizations about the project, stating that it will cause your property values to decline, will cause psychological damage, etc. are not within the intent or purpose of reviewing and evaluating a CEQA document.
Time Extensions for Voluminous CEQA Documents	• For an EIR that is thousands of pages, request an extension for time immediately, even before you complete your own review. Ask for a 60-90 day extension. • Be sure to meet the agency's final deadline to submit the letter and keep a copy of it too.	• Waiting to the last moment of the original close of the review period for a time extension, and the likelihood of that agency granting diminishes. • The agency doesn't have to consider letters that are submitted beyond the deadline.
Focus of Review	• Specific details and examples should include one or more of the following categories: (1) sufficiency of the CEQA document to identify and analyze all potential significant impacts to the physical environment, (2) actions that can be taken to avoid or substantially reduce those significant impacts, and (3) feasible alternatives or mitigation measures that are better than what are found in the CEQA document.	• Having high expectations that the agency has to look at all alternatives and mitigation measures. • CEQA does not require the agency to do all studies, experiments, etc. that reviewers "demand." Only that the agency look at a "reasonable" range of alternatives.

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Where to Start	• For large CEQA documents, read the Executive Summary to learn how the document is formatted, how the alternatives and proposed project are identified, and what are the agency's findings of significance for each environmental category along with their proposed mitigation measures. • Use the summary like a roadmap to begin your review journey in deciding what section(s) you will read.	• Skipping the summary and going right into the document may be overwhelming and a waste of time.
Understanding the Project from Construction to Operation to Routine Maintenance	• Skim through the descriptions of the project and alternatives. If you have the time, read them through very carefully. • Most importantly, what are the project objectives? They are key in defining the project itself as well as being a key criteria in developing a reasonable range of feasible alternatives.	• Without knowing all aspects of the project, it is impossible to understand how it or the alternatives will impact the physical environment.
Knowing the Environment	• Focus on those sections (that interest you) that detail the environment to be substantially altered after the project or alternative is approved and construction begins. • The following CEQA categories are typically analyzed in large CEQA documents: Aesthetics, Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Energy, Geology and Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Land Use and Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation and Traffic, and Utilities and Service Systems.	• Reading "word for word" the excessive "padding" that is found in the CEQA document on describing the physical environment will wear you out, and you will not be able to focus on the analyses themselves.
Assessing the Impact Analyses and the Proposed Mitigation Measures	• Read with a critical mind. Also, ask yourself questions as you read, such as does the analyses make sense? Are assumptions in the analyses flawed? Is the agency minimizing the significance of the impacts? Are there significant impacts that the agency missed? Can you identify gaps in the logic? Poor methodologies used? Are the mitigation measures useless and better ones available?	• Not being specific enough with your comments can be ignored by the lead agency and will not be cited in a CEQA lawsuit. • Hearsay, mere disagreement between experts, non-facts, etc. are not evidence in a CEQA lawsuit.