



TAKE ACTION: What is an

Ordinance?

What is an Ordinance?

In the simplest terms, an **ordinance** is a law at the local level. Cities write ordinances to govern day-to-day life. Ordinances control what you can do in public spaces, the types of things plots of land can be used for (called **zoning**) and the consequence for violating all those rules. They also lay out the rules and responsibilities of different parts of local government such as agencies, departments and more. City ordinances do have some limitations. For example, state law or constitution limit or control what an ordinance can deal with and can control the size of any fine for violating an ordinance.

Step 1: Read this (100% real!) sample ordinance from Providence, Rhode Island.

“No person shall cast, throw, place or deposit on any sidewalk or crosswalk in any street or public place within the corporate limits of the city, any part or portion of any fruit or vegetable or other substances which, when stepped upon by any person, is liable to cause or does cause such person to slip or fall.”

(The full text of this ordinance is available in the Providence, Rhode Island Code of Ordinances; bit.ly/3eJeMqG)

Step 2: Answer the following question: *In your own words, what are Providence residents not allowed to do?*

Step 3: If this were your **ordinance**, how would you write it? Well, now it's your turn to **amend**, or change, the original by filling in the blanks with the type of word associated with each blank.

Amended Fruit Ordinance

"No person shall _____ in any _____ within the corporate limits of
(action verb) (location)

the _____, any part or portion of any fruit or vegetable or other _____
(city/town location) (least favorite food)

which, when _____ upon by any _____, is liable to cause or
(verb ending in -ing) (species)

does cause such a person to _____ or fall."
(verb)

Activity: Create Your Own Ordinance

Step 4: Read the following ordinance from Biddeford, Maine and the description for each part of an ordinance. As you develop your ordinance remember that an effective ordinance will include:

Title

Give your ordinance a title. For example, “An Act on Protections for Students in Boston” or “An Act on Learning from Home in Oklahoma City”.

- Include the issue you have chosen (paying rent, street cleanliness, quarantine snacks, instagram live, etc)
- Include the name of your city/town.

Chapter

Number your chapter (this can be your favorite number).

Label your chapter with how you think your ordinance issue should be categorized. For example, if your ordinance is about too many instagram live events, your chapter headline could be “social media, technology, and entertainment.”

An Act on Using Public Spaces in Biddeford, Maine

Chapter 23 - STREET, SIDEWALKS, AND PUBLIC SPACES

Article III: Sidewalks

Sec. 62-58 - Riding bicycles, skating on sidewalks prohibited; penalty.

(a) No person shall ride a bicycle upon any public sidewalk in the City. No person shall skate on any sidewalk in the City.

(b) Whoever violates or fails to comply with any of the provisions of this section may be punished by a fine of not more than \$10.

Article

Write a brief mini-title that lets the reader know what your ordinance is about.

Section

State the main point of your ordinance. There can be more than one.

Subsections

State the different points of your ordinance, what is included in this law, and what consequences will take place.

Adapted from Biddeford, ME, Code of Ordinances

(<https://ecode360.com/15150064>).

You can find other examples here: Handout #5: Sample Ordinances ([Google Doc](#))

Draft Your Ordinance

Step 4: Draft your own ordinance for an community issue that concerns you:

Ordinance Part	My Ordinance Draft
<p>Title Include main issue, name of city/town, and state.</p>	<p>An Act on _____ (issue like hunger, snack needs, screen time, etc)</p>
<p>Chapter Number your chapter (your favorite number). Label your chapter with how you think your ordinance issue should be categorized.</p>	<p>Chapter ____ - _____ (issue category like food access, home security, etc)</p>
<p>Article Number your article from 1-3. This should be a brief mini-title that notes what your ordinance is about.</p>	<p>Article _____: _____ (mini-title like food, technology, etc)</p>
<p>Section Number your section. This can look like sec 22-45. State the main point of your ordinance.</p>	<p><i>Why does this issue matter to your community?</i> Sec. _____ - _____: _____ (main idea)</p>
<p>Subsections State the different points of your ordinance, what is included in this code, and what consequences will take place</p>	<p>(a) <i>What do you think could help fix this issue?</i></p> <p>(b) <i>What do you think people should do to solve this issue?</i></p> <p>(c) <i>What should be the consequence for someone who does not follow this ordinance?</i></p>

Final Ordinance

Step 3: Using the example on the first page, write out the final version of your ordinance here below.



Congratulations! You just created your own city/town law!

Step 4: Follow the steps below to share it on social media.

- Post a screenshot or take a photo of your ordinance on social media.
- Don't forget to add #democracydoesntpause and tag @generationcitizen on Instagram or @gencitizen on Twitter
- Consider including a call to action for your followers to retweet, repost, or send their own message.
- Tag your city/town representative—they may respond!