

Letter to the Editor

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Letters to the editor are published in most newspapers. A letter to the editor is a brief letter, usually between 150-300 words long, expressing an opinion on a single topic. The “Letters to the Editor” section is one of the most widely read, so getting a letter published there is a great way to make your voice heard.

Preparation & Prewriting

Choose your topic

You can share your opinion, highlight a problem, raise a concern, or praise a success. For example, you could share your views about an issue in an upcoming election, raise awareness for a charitable cause, or praise an outstanding local event.

Choose your publication

Each newspaper will have slightly different criteria for its letters to the editor, so you should choose the newspaper you want to write to before you begin writing. Pick the newspaper that will best help you reach the community you want to talk to. It is typically easier to get published in smaller newspapers, since they tend to receive fewer submissions. You may want to read some of the previously published letters to the editor in that newspaper to give you examples for how you might write your own letter.

Brainstorm

Because letters to the editor are so short there is only space for one argument. Write out all of the things you want to say. Which is the most important? Which can be removed? Are there any facts or statistics you can include?

Writing & Style

Get to the point

When you start writing, make sure to grab your readers’ attention and let them know in the first sentence what you are talking about. Newspaper editors may need to cut down your letter to fit it in the paper, and they will usually cut from the bottom up. Therefore, make sure your most important information is near the top. State your opinion. Include facts and statistics if necessary, making sure to mention where you got them. Keep it brief. Then leave your readers with a powerful concluding statement that will help them remember what you’ve said.

Be credible

Keep your language clean, respectful, and intelligent. People are more likely to respect and listen to your opinion if they feel you know what you are talking about and have respect for others.

Revise & Submit

Part of sounding credible is cleaning up your writing. Read your letter aloud and have someone you trust read over your letter too. Does it say what you want to say? Could you make your message clearer?

Letter to the Editor

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Check your newspaper for their submission guidelines. Make sure to submit your letter as soon as possible so that it will still be relevant. If your letter is chosen for publication, you will probably get a phone call to verify that you are the author.

Resources Used & Helpful Websites

- The Community Toolbox (more information and tips for writing letters to the editor),
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1239.aspx
- Sierra Club Writing Tips (tips for improving your letters to the editor),
<http://www.sierraclub.org/takeaction/toolkit/letters.asp>