

## 5 Tips for Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor

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How do you get an idea across to hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of people? Through the news media! The goals of the media are to inform, to educate, to entertain, and to persuade. That last goal is where you come in! Letters to the editor and/or opinion pieces from informed individuals that take a strong stand on a hot topic are a large part of the media's persuasion function, along with opinions expressed by the media outlet itself, such as political endorsements.

When you write a letter to the editor, keep the following in mind:

### 1. PURPOSE

What is your desired outcome? What do you want to see happen as a result of your letter or opinion column? Who do you want to persuade or take action? Use the answers to these questions when crafting your message.

### 2. TIMING

If you're reacting to something you heard on TV news or read in an article, you should respond quickly. Especially in today's 24-hour news climate, events have a very short shelf life.

### 3. BREVITY

Limit your content to one or two key points. Be sure to check the media outlet's policy on letter length, or the length of guest opinion pieces, and stay within those guidelines. A common newspaper limit is 600 words.

### 4. CONVICTION

State your reason for writing. Take a strong stand. Explain what you know to be factual about the situation, with enough information to establish your credibility. Tell the reader what you want to have happen. And that's it.

### 5. SIGN OFF

You will need to include your name, and some media outlets will only publish letters that are submitted with a mailing address. If you don't want your home address made public, use an alternative, but legitimate, address, such as your workplace or a mailbox.



## Suggested Format & Guidelines for an Effective Letter to the Editor

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The format below can be helpful, although you should put things in your own words as much as possible. This format will remind you to:

- ★ State the issue of concern.
- ★ Explain why the matter is timely.
- ★ Demonstrate your experience or expertise on the issue, and how it informs your opinion.
- ★ Discuss the facts that inform your opinion.
- ★ Describe what you want to have happen, and by whom.
- ★ Sign off appropriately.

### Letter to the Editor Template

[Newspaper Name]

[Newspaper Address]

[Date]

Dear Editor:

Yesterday, you reported that \_\_\_\_\_.

This is [timely/interesting/incorrect] because \_\_\_\_\_.

As a [victim advocate/parent/volunteer/voter/community member], my perspective is \_\_\_\_\_.

What people don't realize is \_\_\_\_\_.

One thing that could really make a difference is \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Info (usually email address, address, and/or phone number)]