

Be an Advocate

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

What is a letter to the editor?

A letter to the editor is a written way of talking to a newspaper, magazine, or other regularly printed publication. Letters to the editor are generally found in the first section of the newspaper, or toward the beginning of a magazine, or in the editorial page. They can take a position for or against an issue, simply inform, or both. They can convince readers by using emotions, facts, or emotions and facts combined. Letters to the editor are usually short and tight, **rarely longer than 300 words**. Using a few carefully placed letters, you can generate plenty of community discussion. You can also keep an issue going by preventing it from disappearing from the public eye. You can stimulate the interest of the news media and create more coverage for the matters you're working on. You can also send a "good news" letter to bring recognition to people who deserve it or acknowledge the success of an effort.

Why should you write a letter to the editor?

Letters to the editor are among the most widely read features in any newspaper or magazine. They allow you to reach a large audience. You can probably think of many more specific reasons why you might want to write to the editor, but here are a few general ones:

- You think that an issue is so important that you have to speak out
- You are responding to a recently published article and elaborating on the content
- Part of your group's strategy is to persuade others to take a specific action
- Educate or influence the general public on a specific policy matter
- Influence policy makers or elected officials directly or indirectly
- Publicize the work of NWPC-VA and attract new members

When should you write a letter to the editor?

Letters to the editor can be written any time you want to shape public opinion, tell others how you feel about people, programs, or ideas, or just inform the public on a certain issue. They are a great way to increase awareness of the issues that you or your organization are working for, as well as to advocate for your cause. A planned series of letters to the editor can stimulate public interest and media coverage. It's up to you to determine when the best time is to start writing the letters, allowing time for them to be published. Keep in mind that if you want to inform the public of a certain action your organization is about to take, you may want to think of issuing a press release instead. If newspapers consistently ignore your news releases, your best choice may be a letter to the editor.

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How do you write a letter to the editor?

- Open the letter with a simple salutation.
- Grab the reader's attention and explain what the letter is about at the start.
- Explain why the issue is important and explain the issue and its importance
- Use plain language that most people will understand.
- Give evidence for any praise or criticism.
- Offer solutions for any problems you are addressing.
- Throughout your letter, be quick, be concise, and then be quiet.
- Sign the letter. Make sure you include your title as well as your name. It adds credibility, especially if it's relevant to the topic being discussed.
- If your letter is not accepted the first time around, try again. You might submit a revised version with a different angle on the issue at a later date.

You do not have to be the only one to write the letter: letters are often published with multiple signers. You also don't have to be the only one to write a letter. Several people may write letters on the same topic with the same or slightly different points, and submit them a few days apart, so that the issue stays on the Letters page for a period of time.

Submission Tips

Make sure you check the maximum word count in the editorial page guidelines and **email your letter to an actual editor** from the publication's masthead rather than just submitting via an online form. Have your piece ready **at least one week** before you want it to hit the papers. Or if you are responding to a recent article or event, do so within the first few days afterward. Don't forget to include your phone number and email address.

Adapted from a longer document at the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/letters-to-editor/main>



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