

Writing Letters to the Editor

What is a letter to the editor?

Most publications—newspapers and magazines—contain “letters to the editor.” This is a forum for the readers of that publication to speak out, give their opinions, and respond to that publication and its readers.

Why would someone want to read what I have to say?

As a reader of a particular publication, you have something in common with the other readers. In a way, the readers create a “community” and communities like to listen to, and talk to, each other. Your letter could support another reader’s response to an article or an issue. Other times, it will make people think about their own positions. This type of “dialogue” is what makes a dynamic and civil society work and grow.

What should be included in a letter to the editor?

Generally, letters to the editor address a particular issue that is going on in the community, or respond to an article that was recently published in that publication. So, it should include a brief statement about the issue, or article. Then, typically, these letters include the author’s opinion. Strong letters to the editor acknowledge that others may feel differently. They also include reasons for the opinion that the readers of the publication can relate to. There are no hard-and-fast rules for letters to the editor, but these things are generally included in all of them.

How long should it be?

The best letters to the editor are SHORT. If you take a look at other letters in newspapers and magazines, you’ll see that they are typically one or two paragraphs. This is what makes them difficult to write. You’ve got to get your opinion, and the reasons for it, clearly stated in a very short space. Sometimes it works to draft out what you want to say, without thinking of length and then cut it down to size.

How important is grammar/spelling/punctuation?

You should be careful with this type of letter, but if you have a single typo or mistake, the newspaper or magazine editor will surely fix it for you. Although, if you have too many, your letter will probably not get published.

Does it need to be typed/computed?

Yes. And, usually double-spaced. Check for the “letter to the editor” guidelines in the publication you are sending to.

How do I send it?

Nowadays, most publications have email addresses for letters to the editor. Look under the letters to the editor section in the newspaper or magazine for the specific guidelines and addresses.

The Community Writing Center has some books that give examples of letters to the editor. They will provide you with questions to help generate ideas for your letter, and advice on how to make it as brief and clear as possible. We also have many magazines and newspapers that you can look at for examples. CWC Writing Assistants are also available to assist you at any state of your letter writing process.

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