



**Share4Rare**

## **Guidelines**

### **How to write a Letter to the Editor**

## Purpose

Since the earliest days of newspaper and magazine publishing, community members have written letters to publication editors as a way to respond to stories they've read. These letters could range in topics from heart-warming human interest notes, to comments about publication design, to the more common and sometimes passionate political rants.

As more and more of our publications have gone entirely "online", the art of writing well-researched, well-constructed letters has dwindled.

But letters to editors are still appearing in many publications, and teachers find that assigning this type of letter is useful in developing many skills. Teachers could use this exercise to encourage student participation in political discourse, or they may find this exercise valuable as a tool for developing logical argument essays.

Whether you're responding to a class requirement, or you're motivated by a passionate point of view, you can use these guidelines to draft a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine.

**Difficulty:** Quite Hard

**Time Required:** Three drafts

## Here's How:

1. **Select a topic or a publication.** If you are writing because you've been instructed to do so in a class assignment, you should start by reading a publication that is likely to contain articles that interest you. It is a good idea to read your local newspaper to look for local and current events that matter to you. You may also choose to look at magazines that contain articles that interest you. Fashion magazines, science magazines, and entertainment publications all contain letters from readers.
2. **Read instructions provided.** Most publications provide guidelines. Look over the first few pages of your publication for a set of suggestions and guidelines and follow them carefully.
3. **Include your name, address, email address and phone number at the top of your letter.** Editors often require this information because they will need to verify your identity. You can state that this information is not to be published. If you are responding to an article or letter, say so right away. Name the article in the first sentence of the body of your letter.
4. **Be concise and focused.** Write your letter in pithy, clever statements, but remember that this is not easy to do! You will probably need to write several drafts of your letter to condense your message.
5. **Limit your writing to two or three paragraphs.** Try sticking to the following format:
  - In your first paragraph, introduce your problem and sum up your objection.
  - In the second paragraph, include a few sentences to support your view.
  - End with a great summary and a clever, punchy line.



6. **Proofread your letter.** Editors will ignore letters that contain bad grammar and poorly written rants.
7. **Submit your letter by email if the publication allows it.** This format enables the editor to cut and paste your letter.

### Tips:

1. If you're responding to an article you've read, be prompt. Don't wait a few days or your topic will be old news.
2. Remember that the more popular and widely-read publications receive hundreds of letters. You have a better chance of getting your letter published in a smaller publication.
3. If you don't want your name to be published, state so clearly. You can put any direction or request like this in a separate paragraph. For example, you can simply put "Please note: I do not want my full name to be published with this letter." If you are a minor, inform the editor of this as well.
4. Since your letter may be edited, you should get to the point early. Don't bury your point inside a lengthy argument. Don't appear to be overly emotional. You can avoid this by limiting your exclamation points. Also, avoid insulting language.
5. Remember that short, concise letters sound confident. Long, wordy letters give the impression that you're trying too hard to make a point.

### What You Need:

- Newspaper or magazine
- Computer or paper and pen
- A strong point of view

## References and additional resources

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