

Answering back with a letter to the editor

When and how to write a letter to the editor

A letter to the editor is a great opportunity to correct misinformation, provide a different perspective on an important issue or endorse an argument that you think is important.

A letter to the editor is usually much easier to place than an op-ed, since it is significantly shorter and newspapers frequently run multiple letters on the same issues.

If you've read an article that you think is misleading or has incorrect information or seen an opinion piece that you disagree with, a letter to the editor might be an easy way to get your message in print. And the letters pages of some publications are often the most widely read section.

So what are the keys to a good letter?

- Shorter is always better. Most newspapers have a word limit for letters, usually around 250 – 300 words.
- Begin your letter with a reference to the news story or opinion piece you are responding to.
- Make your first sentence short and compelling. Your goal is to grab the editor's, and then the reader's attention.
- Don't try to cover all the key points – pick one (or two). The best letters make a single point, convincingly yet briefly.
- Draw from your own experience. Humanize and personalize.
- Give evidence for any praise, criticism or correction.
- Play nice. Don't attack the personal views of a columnist, reporter or fellow letter writer.
- Move quickly. Write and submit your letter as soon after the original article as possible.
- You can include multiple signers on a letter (usually 2-3 max.)
- Your group or coalition may also send multiple letters from different people on the same topic. You can write letters 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.
- Be sure to provide your full name, phone number and email. Include your job title and organization and other relevant affiliations that show your expertise.
- Don't send the same letter to multiple outlets.