

10 Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Following are suggestions to help you submit the kind of letter most likely to get printed on the letters page.

1. **Address your letter "To the Editor."** This way, the newspaper will know you intend for it to be published on the letters page.
2. **Grab the readers' attention in the opening sentence.** Make it interesting but short. Don't make the readers wait to find out what you want to say; tell them your key point at the beginning. If you can allude to an article or editorial that appeared recently in that paper, so much the better.
3. If you write to criticize a previous letter or article, try to **begin with appreciation, points of agreement, and/or praise.** Letters full of vitriol are readily dismissed by readers; letters that are calm and constructive are persuasive.
4. **Express your ideas clearly and concisely.** For the sake of readability, endeavor to use short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs. (Yes, we are participating in the dumbing down of America. Sigh.)
5. **Confine yourself to one topic.**
6. **Use a relevant personal experience or local situation** to illustrate your point. This really helps you connect with your readers.
7. **Tell the readers what action you want them to take** (e.g. contact their representatives, join our rally, boycott Tesla, etc.).
8. **Do not exceed the word limit.** Each outlet has its own limit (consult their website), but in any case, it is preferable to restrict your letter to no more than 250-300 words. (Yes, it is very difficult to compose such a short letter, but if you want it published—and if you want the readers to actually read it—shorter is better.) As Pascal famously remarked: "I have made this letter longer than usual because I have not had time to make it shorter."
9. **End with your full name, address, telephone number, and e-mail.** (The latter info will not be published; it is just for verification).
10. Hey: it's the twenty-first century. **Newspapers now accept letters electronically.** Go to their website to learn their submission procedures.