

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WHAT IS A LETTER TO THE EDITOR (LTE)?

A letter to the editor (LTE) is a short letter submitted to a newspaper typically on an issue of concern to its readers.

WHY WRITE AN LTE?

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. Submitting letters to the editors of your local newspapers is a powerful and effective way to get the word out about your campaign to a wide audience, including the paper's readership, community leaders, and elected officials who often read letters to the editor to learn where their constituents stand on the issues that affect their community.

After you write letters to your elected officials, sending letters to the editor can achieve other advocacy goals because they:

- reach a large audience.
- are often monitored by elected officials.
- can bring up information not addressed in a news article.
- publicly shares community support for or opposition to an issue.

Follow this general outline for your LTE:

- introduce the topic
- state your position
- tell your personal story
- state a few key statistics or facts about the issue
- conclude with your call to action.

TIPS ON WRITING YOUR LTE

Keep it short and on one subject. Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters—usually 150-250 words. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper. Use the ACLU's ["Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials"](#) online resource as a guide.

Be sure to include your contact information. Newspapers may only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify their identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city if your letter is published.

Make references to the newspaper. While some papers print general commentary, many will prioritize letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:

- I was disappointed to see that The Post's May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
- I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date).

Mention your elected officials by name in the letter. Elected officials take notice when their name is in the paper and you can really get on their radar if you address them directly.

SUBMITTING YOUR LTE

When you're ready, submit your letter. Go to your local newspaper's website and search for directions for submitting it online. If you can't find submission information online (common with small local papers), you can also call or email them to ask for guidance. You can also mail your letter to wherever your newspaper receives physical mail.

Check the paper each day after you submit your letter. That way, you'll know as soon as your letter has been published and you can begin sharing it on social media and email listservs so it reaches an even wider audience.

Post a picture of your letter to the editor on your social media. It furthers your reach for new community members to learn about your campaign, updates your team on updates in the campaign, and could go viral!

Email or mail a copy to your campaign target. If your letter is published, send a copy by email or print to your campaign target, such as an elected official, and make your next ask (a meeting, introducing specific legislation, etc).

If your letter isn't published within a few days, make some tweaks and submit again. You can also try submitting the same letter to another paper—just make sure not to submit the same letter to the same paper in the same 1-2 day period. Take what you create and space it out over different publications and at least a week's time.

CONTACT US!

HAVE A QUESTION?

Email us at outreach@aclu-ia.org.

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