

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. After you write, call, or visit 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
- Raise issues or reference information not addressed in a news article
- Can offer a personal story about the impact of a bill on people's lives
- Amplify public support for or opposition to an issue

Tips for writing a letter to the editor [\[view on our website\]](#)

Submit your letter at least 3-5 days in advance of when you hope to have the letter appear. Be aware that most papers have a policy regarding frequency of submission, usually no more than one letter per month.

Keep letters short and on one subject. Many newspapers have limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief (150-250 words) will help prevent the newspaper from editing out your key points. Readers naturally gravitate toward shorter letters as well.

Short, heartfelt statements are often more powerful than lengthy legal arguments. Keep in mind that newspaper readers have varying levels of education and experience. Your letter must make sense to a wide range of people in order to be effective. If you have personal experience related to the issue you're writing about, consider including it. Personal testimonies are very effective.

Send letters to weekly community newspapers, too. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.

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

- I was disappointed to see that the Post-Gazette's May 18 editorial, "Title of Editorial," omitted some of the key considerations in the redistricting debate.
- I strongly disagree with [author's] narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op Ed," date)
- I was pleased to see your article ("Title of Article," date) regarding statewide efforts to reform Pennsylvania's criminal justice system.

Get the most from your letter by replying to dissenting views. Although many newspapers limit submissions to a certain number per person, most will allow letter writers to respond to criticism of their original letter. Take the opportunity to spread your message further by submitting a short response.

Always include your full name, address and daytime telephone number for confirmation purposes.

Many newspapers will 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 should your letter be published. [\[Submit a letter to a PA paper\]](#)

Send the letter to your legislator. If your letter is printed, make sure to email a copy of the letter posted online or send a copy of the letter printed in the newspaper to your legislator so they see you cared enough about this issue to take the time to write. [\[Find your legislator\]](#)

Letter to the editor | Template

Include your full name, title (if relevant), address, phone number, and e-mail address with your submission. Many publications will contact you to confirm that you are really the author of the letter.

Make it topical.

What makes your letter relevant now? If possible, begin by referencing a recent story or editorial in the paper you're submitting the letter to, a current event, or recent legislation.

State the problem.

Why is this issue a matter of public concern? Briefly summarize the issue.

Make it personal.

What makes you care about this issue? If applicable, include any personal experience or expertise—personal testimonies are very effective. You can write from the perspective of your occupation, your own experience with the given topic, or as a long-standing member of the local community.

Describe the problem.

What information can you offer to support your position? Explain what you know to be factual about the situation. Limit your content to one or two key points.

Suggest a solution.

What is your desired outcome? This is your call to action. Tell the reader what you want to have happen and by whom, e.g., asking your legislator to vote yes/no on a bill; asking others to contact their elected officials, etc.

Check your letter for spelling and grammar mistakes before sending it!

Letter outline

Dear Editor:

Recently, you reported that _____.

This is [concerning/problematic/encouraging] because _____.

As a [voter/advocate/parent/community member], my perspective is _____.

What people don't realize is _____.

One thing that could really make a difference is _____.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your mailing address, email address, and phone number]

Letter to the editor | Sample

Feb. 13 is the anniversary of Gov. Tom Wolf's moratorium on executions. The moratorium was wise because it halted a system that is filled with flaws.

The death penalty risks taking an innocent life. More than 150 people have been exonerated from death row nationally, including six from Pennsylvania. Death sentences are biased against minorities and people who cannot afford a good attorney, and they are overturned much more frequently than they are carried out.

Additionally, the death penalty is fiscally irresponsible. According to the Reading Eagle, our capital punishment system has cost Pennsylvania taxpayers over \$800 million more than the cost of giving inmates life without parole. Other studies show similar results in states across the country. That money should be used for education, roads or effective law enforcement practices.

Pennsylvanians should expect our state to get rid of flawed and costly practices.

The moratorium was an important step in halting our broken capital punishment system. Now we should expect lawmakers to take the next step and get rid of the death penalty once and for all.

Jane Doe
Reading, PA