

Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Did you know that the opinion page is one of the most widely read pages in the newspaper? Because so many people, elected officials included, read the opinion section of their local newspaper, letters to the editor (LTEs) are an excellent way to get media coverage. They are easy to write and have a good chance of being printed.

Getting Ready to Write an LTE

The first step in writing an LTE is to **read the paper** you want to submit it to. When you do, look for 3 things:

1. The newspaper's policy on submitting LTEs (length requirements, address to send it to, etc.)
2. Other articles, LTEs, ads, or opinion pieces that you might be able to respond to
3. What does the editorial page like to editorialize about? This will give you hints about how to pitch your case.

How to Write an LTE

- **Make it your own** – if you're using a sample or template, be sure to change or add to it so it's YOUR letter. Papers are not likely to publish a letter that has been sent in by multiple people.
- **Keep it short** – Most papers have a 150 to 250 word limit and readers are more likely to focus on short, to-the-point LTEs than long wordy ones.
- **Respond** – If there was something in the paper about the subject reference it at the beginning, but when responding to the opposition's opinion avoid re-stating their arguments.
- **Make it Local** – Editors are more likely to print a letter if it has local significance.
- **Pick an Angle** – You likely have many reasons for believing what you are advocating for, but you only have 250 words to tell your side of the story. Pick just one reason tailor the LTE to fit that choice.
- **Name Names** – If you are trying to influence a decision maker be sure to include their name in your letter. This will make it much more likely that they will read your letter.
- **Make it Real** – Wherever possible give facts, use an analogy, or tell a story rather than using rhetoric. This will make your case come to life for the readers.

How to Submit an LTE

Send the LTE to the email address listed on the website or in the opinion section of the newspaper. Be sure to include your full name, address, and phone number. But don't stop there... follow up. Call the LTE editor and ask if s/he received your letter. Also be sure to ask if they plan to print your letter. If not, ask why. If it is because it doesn't fit their requirements offer to revise it and resubmit.

Sample LTE Outline

1. Name the article that you are responding to by title, author and date.
2. State the problem/topic (why you personally are concerned).
3. Describe the problem in a way that makes it more real for the reader.
4. State the solution.
5. Call to action – this is where you name names.