

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OR OPINION PIECE

Writing a letter to the editor is not difficult, and it shouldn't be intimidating. Letters provide an opportunity for you to comment on a news or opinion article published in a particular newspaper. Opinion pieces (or op-eds) can be an effective way to communicate a more elaborate point of view or adding to an ongoing debate.

Keep it short. Letters that are short and to the point are most likely to get published. Keeping your comments to 250 words or less is a good guideline. Keep sentences short, and put your main points first. For op-eds, consider 800 words or less.

Include your contact details. Many publications will need to call to verify that you are the individual who actually submitted the letter. Include your full name, credentials if applicable, contact information, and daytime phone number.

Don't bother with attachments. Put all content in the body of the email.

Expect to be edited. Media reserve the right to edit, condense, or reject any contribution. The shorter and more concise your letter is, the less likely it will be edited.

Respond the same day, or as soon as possible. Some outlets only seem to publish letters in the 2 days following an article. Others will publish a response a week after the original article was printed. But in general, the sooner you get your letter submitted, the better.

Identify the key points you wish to respond to, and limit these to three or less. An article may be riddled with factual errors, but you won't be able to point them all out. By sticking to a few key points your message will be stronger. You can also write a letter that doesn't respond to ANY of the points mentioned in a previously published piece. Perhaps you are just offering a different opinion or outlook on the topic.

The best letters are punchy, witty and sharp. Not everyone can write such masterpieces, however, so don't let that discourage you. Be thoughtful. Make your points in a logical progression. And be yourself. Use your personal experience with the issue or credentials if possible.

