



How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Why write one?

Writing a letter to the editor (LTE) is a great way to influence your community and your legislators. The opinion page is among the most widely read pages of the newspaper, and elected officials pay attention. Plus, you can influence the newspaper even if your letter is not printed. Editors take note of how many letters they receive on a given topic—a large volume of letters can determine what topics they are going to cover. It's like sending an action alert to the public, the newspaper editor, and your legislator, all at the same time.

It's as easy as A-B-C, 1-2-3!

A. About.

Take as your starting point a recent item in the newspaper. Cite the article by headline, author and/or date. Your best chance of being printed comes from responding to an editorial or a front-page story.

B. Brief.

Most newspapers have a policy limiting the length of letters. It's typically between 150-200 words. The policy is usually posted on the paper's letters page or website.

C. Concise.

Keep it short and simple. Make one central point, then stop. (If you feel it needs to be longer, you should write an op-ed article, not an LTE.)

1. State the issue.

Refer to the issue as reported in the newspaper, then say why you agree or disagree. OR: State the issue as you understand it. For example: "Climate change is happening now, and it's hurting our community;" or "Climate change is not just about polar bears. It's about our children's health."

2. Build your case.

Speak in your own voice. Identify your authority, experience, and expertise.

- "As a health professional..." or "As a member of Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility..."
- "In my 14 years of nursing experience, I have observed..."
- "My patients' health/my child's health/my health is affected by climate change/toxic chemicals/pollution, etc."

Include facts, but it's okay to let your feelings be known too. If you are terrified by climate change or worried sick for your patients, your kids or your grandkids, *say so*. People don't remember facts. They do remember when you speak from your heart.

3. Issue a call to action.

Say something about next steps. Be specific. Identify the person or people who need to act, and the action they should take.

- For example: “The Texas Senate should pass SB508 to protect our kids’ health,” or “City Council should vote to transition the City to 100% clean energy by 2020,” or “All of us should do our part by recycling, composting, and reducing our energy use.”
- If an elected official or a corporation should take action, mention them. State their title and use their full name. If your letter is published, send it to the target official or corporation with a brief cover note. This doubles your impact!

A Few More Pro Tips

- **Timeliness is critical.** Submit by e-mail.
- **Local connections matter**—newspapers love ‘em. So be sure to mention if you:
 - live/work/study in the newspaper’s home area;
 - can cite local impacts;
 - are talking about a local elected official or business.
- **Sign with your full name.**
 - State that you are a Texas PSR member.
 - If you are a medical professional, state your credentials.
 - For verification purposes, include your home address, email address, and daytime telephone number. These will not be published.
 - Disclose any personal or financial interest in the subject matter.
- **Edits.** Your letter is subject to editing by the newspaper for length, clarity, and style.
- **Frequency.** Most newspapers will print a letter from the same person only every so often, like once a month, especially in large, high-circulation newspapers. So if your intention is to be published, don’t submit more frequently.
- **Uniqueness.** Your submission must be unique. When the newspaper runs your LTE, it becomes part of their product—they want to know you have not submitted it to or published it in any other media. Once it’s published, you can of course share it in your network and on social media.



Let us know when your letter is printed!

Texas PSR wants to promote your letter, too, so...*please send it to us!* Just send a quick email to TXPSRdirector@gmail.com.

→ This guide is based on national PSR’s guide, written by Barbara Gottlieb.