



Letters to the Editor Toolkit

The opinion page of a newspaper is one of the most widely read. It is also a section that is easiest for an advocate or organization to express their views. It is what some people call the debate society that never adjourns, which is why many lawmakers pay close attention to what people are saying in their local papers. The letter to the editor format is short about 250-300 words, but it allows you have to an impact on the big discussions of the day in your community, and to reach and influence a diverse group of people. Op-eds (opinion editorials) tend to be longer but usually no more than about 600-700 words.

Tips for writing a strong letter:

- ✓ Include your contact information: Most newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity. Newspapers will not give out that information and usually only print your name and city/ town should your letter be published.
- ✓ Have a good hook: A good hook garners attention from both the editors reviewing the letter and readers. Just like a good headline, you want an interesting subject or title for your letter. Many papers will include them when they publish it.
- ✓ Focus on one subject: Keeping your letter/ op-ed to the required word count will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper and ensure that people understand what you are trying to get across.
- ✓ Be accurate and compelling: If you have facts or statistics to back up your point, include them but make sure they are accurate. (The publication may ask you to give a source for a fact or number.)
- ✓ Include a call to action. What is the point of writing this letter? What do you want people to know or do or understand? Include “an ask” or action. What do you want readers to come away thinking?
- ✓ Submit letters to a variety of local papers: The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the more likely it is that your letter will be printed. Get to know the different papers in your community and submit letters to multiple outlets. Just don't send the exact same letter to more than one paper. Change up the hook or the closing.
- ✓ Follow up and advocate: Some papers get hundreds of letters per day and many of them may be on the same topic. Call the newspaper and ask for the editorial page editor. Make sure they received your letter and make a quick pitch on why yours should be published.
- ✓ Language for RISCA Grantees only if applicable to subject of letter: “This activity is made possible in part by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.”

Listing of local newspapers

All submissions must be signed with your name, title (if applicable) and city/ town. More than one person can sign the letter. Remember to include your contact information so an editor can reach out to you.

- *Providence Journal:* 150 words for Letter to the Editor (LTE). Guest commentary/Your Turn 600 words or less. Submit to here: letters@providencejournal.com.
- *Westerly Sun* limit is 250. Submission form: https://www.thewesterlysun.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.

- Southern RI newspapers (Kent County, Charlestown, Coventry, East Greenwich, Narragansett, NK Standard) - word limit is 300.
https://www.ricentral.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *Pawtucket Times* submission form:
https://www.pawtuckettimes.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *Woonsocket Call* submission form:
https://www.woonsocketcall.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *The Independent* (Narragansett, North Kingstown, and South Kingstown) - Send a letter to the editor to: editorial@independentri.com.
- Letters to the Valley Breeze may be sent to: news@valleybreeze.com.
- Currently, the *Newport Daily News* does not have an online submission process, so you may send letters directly to the editor and co-editor: falbert@newportri.com and jcathers@newportri.com
- Letters in the East Bay Newspapers are limited to 500 words. For the *Barrington Times* contact Josh Bickford (jbickford@eastbaynewspapers.com), for *Bristol Phoenix* contact Scott Pickering (spickering@eastbaynewspapers.com), for *East Providence Post* talk to Mike Rego (mrego@eastbaynewspapers.com), for the *Portsmouth Times* talk to Jim McGaw (jmcgaw@eastbaynewspapers.com), for the *Sakonnet Times & Westport Shorelines* reach out to Bruce Burdett (bburdett@eastbaynewspapers.com), and for the *Warren Times-Gazette* connect with Ted Hayes (thayes@eastbaynewspapers.com).

Suggested Template

The below template is suggested. There is no exact science. The best advice is to stay away from stream of consciousness.

For the subject line develop a catchy headline for the op-ed. Identify if it's an op-ed or a letter.

Example of a subject line: Letter or Op-Ed: HEADLINE

At the top of the Word document, add the headline and your name and city/town

First Paragraph: Think of it as an inverted pyramid. Begin with an introduction that tells the reason for writing. What is your purpose? The opening paragraph should contain the main point to draw in readers.

The next paragraphs or paragraph: Detail who you are and why you were compelled to write the LTE or Op-Ed. You should back up your topic with evidence (data, statistics, personal stories, reports/studies, facts, etc.). In this paragraph(s), you are educating readers but not lecturing. Personalize it as much as you can.

Concluding paragraphs: Avoid giving a summary. Here is an opportunity to be persuasive and/or propose a call to action, solution, next steps etc. Let them know what you plan to do and hope they will do. How can they support your thesis, action or advocacy?

Signature, Name, TITLE and COMPANY (if applicable), CITY/TOWN

Remember to keep it short and easy to read.