



## **Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor or an Op-Ed Piece**

- A Letter to the Editor is very short and briefly expresses your opinion on an article or issue that previously appeared in the paper.
- An Op-Ed piece is generally longer and is a venue to make a more thorough argument on the subject of your choice.
- There are often multiple Letters to the Editor on a single subject whereas an Op-Ed will normally publish one pro- and one con- piece on a single subject. So, when writing your piece, decide carefully which forum best suits your purpose.

**Follow the news to make a relevant statement at the right time.** Timing is essential – write a letter when your issue is dominating the news, an important anniversary is coming up, a new report has been released or government officials are considering action on an issue. Newspapers are more likely to publish a Letter to the Editor if in direct, immediate response to an article they published that you reference by title and date.

**Limit your piece to the appropriate length.** Approximately 150-200 words for a Letter to the Editor and 750-1000 words for an op-ed is accepted. Newspapers have limited space and editors generally will not take the time to cut a letter down to size. Be aware many newspapers require that you submit an op-ed to only one newspaper at a time as an exclusive.

**Make a single point well.** Narrow the scope of your piece to encompass a single issue. Make it concise and to the point using short, declarative sentences. Your main message should be no more than a few sentences long.

**Make your main point right away.** Readers will generally not take the time to read the whole article. Hook the reader right away with your main message.

**Make your letter relevant to the reader.** Explain why this issue is important and why the reader should care. One approach is to use examples from your life to connect with the reader and bring your argument to life, speaking in the first person with “I” statements to make your piece personal. Another approach is to use facts and stories that exemplify the need and possibility of genuine solutions to the problem you write about.

**Offer specific recommendations.** This is your opportunity to put yourself out there and make yourself heard. How do you want the situation resolved? How do you want the government to act? What role can readers play to strengthen the movement of people demanding change?

**Acknowledge the other side.** It will make your piece more credible if you acknowledge the opposing views, but remember – you want your point to be coherent, reasoned and promote understanding of your point of view.

**Make the ending strong.** Many readers will skim the headline and your bi-line; read the first paragraph and first sentences of remaining paragraphs; and if you've caught their attention, they read the final paragraph. Make sure your main point is reiterated in your last paragraph.

**Relax and have fun.** Make your piece interesting and unique – it will have a better chance of being published.

**Your best chance of being published is in your local or regional newspaper.** National papers receive hundreds of submissions everyday and can only print a few of them. Also, consider submitting to an online forum.

**Submission.** Include your contact information so the paper can contact you prior to publication to discuss any changes that need to be made and for you to reach agreement on the final piece. Check your paper's website for specific submission instructions or to submit your piece via email.

**Remember to PROOFREAD your piece!**