
How to Write an Effective Letter to the Editor



Writing a letter to the editor can be an effective tool for reaching a broad audience with your message and position on issues that are important to you. Letters to the editor are published on the editorial page in newspapers, which is one of the most read sections in the paper, and are often featured on newspaper websites as well. Many elected officials and their staff also keep tabs on opinion pages to keep in touch with issues of importance to their constituents.

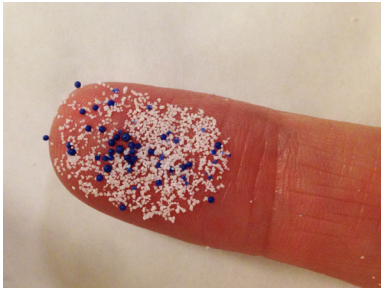
So, how do you write a strong, publishable letter to the editor?

Tips for a strong letter to the editor:

- **Be brief and focused.** Keep it under 200 words, but 150 or fewer is best.
- **Be relevant.** The most publishable letters will respond to specific articles published by the newspaper or refer to current events in a timely manner. Respond to articles within two or three days of publication.
- **Make it personal.** Why do you care? Tell the editor, and readers, who you are and why the issue matters to you and your community.
- **Make your point and back it up.** Clearly make your point. Use facts to back up your claim.
- **Be direct and make a call to action.** Refer to the legislator, organization or other entity by name. Be specific about the action you want them to take.
- **Use your own words.** Be original, don't plagiarize, and don't worry about sounding like a subject matter expert. Your opinion and your voice are what matters.
- **Follow directions.** Most publications accept letters to the editor online and have specific instructions for how to submit your letter. Visit the newspaper's opinion webpage to find instructions or give your newspaper a call to ask.
- **Include your contact information.** Include your name, address, and daytime phone number. Newspapers may want to get in touch with you to verify the letter or if they need to edit it for length.
- **Try, try again.** It's not always easy to get your letter published. So if at first you don't succeed — try, try again!

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Below is an example to help you get started; this letter to the editor from Alliance for the Great Lakes staff ran in the Chicago Tribune in 2015.

Please Don't Trash the Great Lakes

Plastic is everywhere. Tiny plastic fibers are in fleece hats and gloves. The shovels used to dig out from a snow storm, the lids on the cups of coffee, snow sleds kids use at a park, the container holding your takeout lunch, the soda bottles bought for parties — all made of plastic.

Invisible microfibers, tiny microbeads, and large floating garbage patches are commonplace, polluting our planet's waters. Most alarming is the plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.

The lakes provide drinking water for nearly 40 million Americans and Canadians and drive an economy that rivals those of entire nations. They are a resource that deserves our utmost care. In two recent research projects, scientists from Loyola University in Chicago and University of Waterloo in Ontario examined data collected by volunteers through the Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach program. The studies found that the majority of litter found on beaches around Lake Michigan is left there by beachgoers. And 85 percent of the litter left behind on Lake Michigan beaches is plastic. All of that plastic, from soda bottles to takeout containers, eventually breaks down and ends up in the lakes as microplastics, adding to the plastic pollution problem.

We can all be part of reducing this pollution source. Reduce your use of plastic. Recycle what you can. Place trash in an appropriate trash bin or take it home with you to dispose of properly. Limit your use of throwaway plastic items by using refillable containers.

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