

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are effective tools of public health advocacy because they allow access to a general audience. The opinion pages are some of the most frequently-read sections of news sources. In fact, many news sources will publish letters both online and in print, increasing dissemination and reaching larger audiences.

Guidelines

Each individual news agency will have its own submission guidelines, including word limits, but there are some general guidelines to follow:

- **Select an article/paper.** Letters to the editor are in response to a piece that has been published. Read various news sources to find an article that you find noteworthy or which elicits a strong reaction.
- **React!** You should always begin by indicating that your letter is in response to a specific article that the newspaper published. For example, you might start with “I am writing in response to...” (11). You should also do a quick, one or two sentence recap of issue (11).
- **Be timely.** The world of news moves quickly, and a controversial topic can quickly fade out of mind when the next big news story appears. You should aim to have your response written and submitted within a week of the publication of the original article.
- **Be succinct.** Most news agencies impose a maximum of 150-200 words, though letters are often edited to be shorter.
- **Focus on one strong argument.** You have limited space to react, choose one particularly salient point (11). It may be beneficial to provide a statistic, cite a study, or discuss an experience to reframe the argument in your favor (11).
- **Use simple language.** While your topic may be complex or political, avoid using jargon so as to appeal to the average reader (11). Use strong language that conveys an emotion, but avoid sensationalizing your arguments.
- **Provide a call to action.** To close your letter, leave your audience with a call to action. This can take several forms depending on your topic. For example, you might close by saying, “I call upon the governor to veto this bill” or “For more information on transgender rights, visit the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition.”
- **Sign the letter.** Include your first and last name, and often your city. If relevant, cite your job title.

For more information on letters to the editor, visit the following resource:

- [Writing Letters to the Editor – Community Tool Box at University of Kansas](#)