

## STUDENT TOOLS FOR WEBQUESTS

### *How to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper*

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One of the best ways to share your opinion on an important issue with the general public is to send a letter to the editor of your local or major provincial newspaper. If your letter is published, your message could potentially reach thousands of readers.

What makes an effective letter to the editor? What can you do to increase the chance of having your letter printed?

#### ***Content:***

- Make sure the topic of your letter is relevant – Editors generally do not print letters about topics that are irrelevant to readers or that are not related to a recently printed article. On occasion, editors will print responses to other published letters.
- Your letter should be timely – Do not submit a letter that addresses an issue from six months ago. If you see an article in the paper that you agree or disagree with, write your letter to the editor as soon as possible.
- Address the editor – Do not write your letter as if you were speaking to the readers. Address the editor as if you are writing to him/her alone.
- Stick with one topic – Do not address more than one topic per letter. Doing so will reduce its relevance and decrease the likelihood that it will be printed.
- Keep your letter short – Essays are not appropriate for letters to the editor. Keep your letter to 250-300 words. Making sure your points are clear and specific will help reduce the length of your letter.
- Don't make it personal – Keep your letter in good taste by critiquing opinions and ideas. Do not criticize individuals.
- Make sure that your arguments are factual and persuasive, not based on rumours or heresy.

#### ***Basics:***

- Your letter should be in proper business letter format with your address, date, recipient's address, salutation, body, closing, and signature block.
- Proofread and spellcheck your letter. Have a friend or teacher review it before submitting it to the editor.
- If you are responding to an article, make sure you note the author, title, and the date it was printed in your letter.
- Use your real name and contact information. Editors generally do not print anonymous letters; however, you may ask to use a pseudonym (fake name) if you'd rather not be identified. Editors will need your contact information in case they have questions and for their records.
- Submit your letter by regular mail or e-mail. Most major newspapers accept letters to the editor by e-mail or through online feedback forms. Search your newspaper's website for more information.

*Source: Advocating for change – Writing a letter to the editor- Tips for advocates from the Treatment Advocacy Center [http://www.psychlaws.org/GeneralResources/advocates\\_ltrred.htm](http://www.psychlaws.org/GeneralResources/advocates_ltrred.htm)*