

## How to Use Letters to the Editor for Narrative Change & State Advocacy

### What is a Letter to the Editor (LTE)?

A brief (no more than approx. 300 words), targeted message directed to media outlets like newspapers, magazines, or online news outlets and platforms. You may write in response to another news item, [an op-ed](#), or previous, recently published letter to the editor in that paper.

Since the mid-18th century, readers have submitted letters to editors to engage in public discourse; letters can still be a powerful tool in the modern world. Letter writers frequently comment on the role of government in matters of personal freedom or other critical policy concerns. Influential writing sometimes gains national attention.

### How Can I Use This for State Advocacy?

Writing an LTE is a fast, cost-free way to directly engage with a larger audience to share your message. These letters are also a great way to bring awareness to education advocacy topics, influence public opinion, educate policymakers or promote the work you do in your community.

Writing an LTE can also be a strategic way to generate conversations about the issues that are important to you. Many organizers have elevated the issues they are passionate about through the media with a Letter to the Editor to reach a larger audience and highlight solutions.

A published LTE in your hometown paper can be an effective way to grab the attention of your Member of Congress (MoC) and influence them to take action on a particular policy issue.

Legislators and other policymakers track letters to the editor, especially those mentioning their name, to keep their finger on the pulse of public sentiment and issues of importance to their constituency. The editors of a newspaper may be more inclined to provide journalistic coverage on a public issue if it seems there is a lot of attention being paid to it.

### How To Submit A Letter To The Editor:

1. Find your local newspaper's "Letters to the Editor" submission instructions on their website.
2. Be sure to check that you are obeying your newspaper's word limit, sometimes as low as 150-200 words.
3. Write your letter! See below for tips on how to make your letter more compelling:
  - a. Paste your letter into the body of an email or use the submission form on the newspaper's website. **Do not send the letter as an email attachment**—editors will typically disregard emails that contain attachments.
  - b. Note that many newspapers require submitting writers to include contact information (such as email and phone number) with their letter. This information won't be published; it is just to verify your identity.
  - c. Consider submitting to a smaller local paper, not just the nearest big city paper. You'll have a better chance of getting published.

### What Should Go Into A Letter To The Editor:

- Begin with greeting: "To the Editor" or it can also address the name of the editor if known.

- Open with a sentence that grabs readers attention. Ask yourself, “what would captivate and engage me as a reader?”
- Explain your “What:” Put the main points in the first paragraph; the most effective letters are to the point right off the bat. Since word count is limited, there is no need to make the reader wait.
- Explain your “Why:” Answer why the issue is important to you and your community. Sticking to one topic is best. This is also the space to share a bit of your connection to the education issue and why it is important to speak out. Again, it may be helpful to review [Ed Trusts’ language style guide](#) and [ETN Talking Points](#) for this component of your letter.
- State opinion about what should be done about a particular issue. Be solution oriented.
- Sign letter

### **Tips For Writing Your Letter:**

- **Focus on one topic.** If you have two, write a second letter.
- **Obey the word limit.** If your letter gets long, write a second letter.
- **Be clear and concise**—you only have around 200 words or fewer to make your point.
- **Be yourself.** You don’t need to talk like an academic or a policy expert.
- **Pick a timely issue** to comment on (nothing says “old news” like old news).
- **Make your letter locally relevant**, i.e., write about how the issue you are writing about affects you, your community, or your state.
- **Target in-state and local community newspapers.** You are more likely to get published in a smaller paper than a larger one.
- **Tailor your letter to the paper.** Writing to your local publication may have a different feel than if writing to a major national news source.
- **Submit your letter to only one paper at a time.** A paper will want exclusive rights to your submission. It’s fine to inquire after a few days to let the editor know you would like to try another paper if they won’t be publishing your letter ([check here for publications in your state](#)).
- **Follow the paper’s guidelines** about the submission process. You may be emailing or using an online submission form (see [this example for the Astorian](#), a local Oregon newspaper).
- **Try to include a couple of key points, a statistic, and a personal note.**
- **Conclude with a “call to action.”** This could be to: 1) thank state leaders for their support on the issue; 2) urge leaders to act on the issue; and/or 3) encourage fellow constituents to contact their local leaders/legislators about the issue.

### **What To Avoid in Your Letter to The Editor:**

- Avoid bringing up or spending too much energy on the potential opposition’s point of view unless to quickly reference it with purpose or quick rebuttal.
- Do not share your personal contact information in the letter like your address, email, or phone number. Be broad if you do (ex. I live in town/city/county)
- Avoid going over the word limit allowed.
- It is rare a letter is accepted by “Anonymous”

### **What Does an Exemplar of a Letter to the Editor Look Like For Education Issues?**

#### **EXAMPLE #1 TEMPLATE:**

*Editor's Name*

*Newspaper Name*

*Editor's Address*

*Date*

Dear Editor,

The opening line should reference the article you are referencing (i.e., With respect to the article "titled like this,"), and then state your position. The rest of the paragraph should summarize your issue of concern in a way that captures the attention of the reader. This is your opportunity to tie your issue to a recently discussed topic, take a stance on a debated topic, or correct an error or misrepresentation you felt was portrayed in an article.

Explain your ties to the issue. In other words, why are you speaking out about the subject? The subsequent paragraphs should further explain your issue and why people should care about it. If you have data or statistics to bolster your argument, this is a good place to use them.

Follow your explanation with a call to action. What is at stake if no action is taken? What will happen if people respond with action? Make the consequences of each very clear, and try, when possible, to inform the reader about the direct impact of taking or not taking action.

In your concluding paragraph, recap your point, reiterate your call to action, and include specific information on how readers can get involved.

Sincerely,

*Name*

*Organization*

*Email*

*Phone number*

#### **EXAMPLE TEMPLATE #2 (More for Letter Writing Campaign):**

- **1st paragraph:** Clearly state your position on an issue/bill. Call on committee members or other legislators to agree. Include the bill number and title, so readers can look it up after reading your letter. and a statement that you hope your legislators/other voters will support the bill, too.  
Example: "I strongly support [BILL NUMBER, BILL NAME] sponsored by [REPRESENTATIVE/SENATOR LAST NAME]. It's time for our legislature to do the same."
- **2nd paragraph:** Two or three short sentences about why you've taken your position. Make it personally meaningful and locally relevant. Example: "As a classroom teacher, I have watched my fellow teachers begin to exit the classroom year after year due to lack of supports to ensure their well-being. This in turn leaves our students with empty classrooms, lack of representation, and a lack of quality academic supports. No school or student in [STATE] should have to go through another year of teacher vacancies."

- **3rd and final paragraph:** State you are glad that [ORGANIZATION] is advocating for increased mental health supports and diversifying the educator workforce, and encourage readers to visit [ORGANIZATION’S WEBSITE] for more information. Example: “With the support of [local grassroots organization] and The Education Trust (STATE) we can get this law passed. Learn more at [WEBSITE URL].”

#### **Additional Sources:**

- [Writing Letters to the Editor](#), Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- [Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor](#), ACLU
- [Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor](#), Union of Concerned Scientists
- [History of writing letters to the editor](#), Wikipedia

#### **Other Examples of Letters to the Editor**

- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (New York)
- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (Kansas)
- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (Maine)
- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (New York)
- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (USA)
- [Sample letter to the editor](#) (Delaware)

#### **Where Can I Learn More?**

- <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/letter-editor-template>
- <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/writingalettertotheeditor.pdf>
- <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/letters-to-editor/main>