

Letter to the Editor Toolkit

Introduction to Writing a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor is a great way to advocate for local issues. Letters to the editor are personal or group statements about some topic or issue. The audience for letters to the editor is the newspaper reading locals, so discussing issues particular to that audience in ways that they will understand is key. Letter to the editor should be persuasive calls to action for the audience around an important issue.

Advantages

- Can be crafted for greatest efficiency because the audience is known.
- Can persuade and inform people who read the paper.
- Can disseminate information about how to advocate for an issue (i.e. who to contact).
- Can be written by a group or collective in a town or district.

Limitations

- It is difficult to ensure the letter to the editor reaches everyone who would be of the same opinion.
- Must be short and to the point.
- Can usually only discuss one topic.

Materials Needed

- E-mail capabilities or envelope and stamps
- Computer or pens and paper
- A writer
- Clear information about issues

Elements of a Letter to the Editor

Introducing yourself – let the audience know that you live in their district and are connected to other voters in the community. Explain why you are writing the letter.

Introduce the issue – share as many specifics about the issue as you can, particularly the bill number, what your desired outcome on the issue is, who to contact about the issue, and why it is important for your readers to consider.

Calling for action – ask the audience to consider voicing their opinion on the issue to the appropriate legislators at the local and state level. Encourage voting regarding the issue. Encourage people to reach out to your organization in order to collaborate on future advocacy.

Sample Letter (courtesy of American Library Association)

Dear Editor:

I'm writing to express my concern that hours may be cut at our branch libraries. As a cost-cutting measure, the City is recommending that the library close all branches on Mondays.

I am a staff member at the XYZ Branch, and I work weekday afternoons. Each day, as school closes, dozens of students file into the library to do homework, use the library's 13 computers, or socialize in a safe place. Many of these children would otherwise go home to empty houses, and the library is the one place that provides a secure, supervised alternative to being home alone.

Our library has put several after-school programs in place to give students who are not doing homework something constructive to do; and other library customers have told us that they are surprised and delighted that the young people are so well-behaved. Teachers have called to say that some of their struggling students' work has improved since spending afternoons at the library. Parents have told us they are grateful for the library's welcome to their children. Closing on Mondays will be a major disruption for these children, and I'm certain there are other ways to save money without risking their safety and the productive use of their afternoons.

I urge your readers to contact their City Council representatives and urge them to vote to keep libraries open! Contact information is on the library's website at [www.\(provide a web address\)](#).

Sincerely,

Your name and address. (Your address will not be published.)

Description of Materials

Computer & E-mail or Pen, paper, and envelope: A letter to the editor of a local newspaper can be sent over e-mail or by mail. Make sure the address is clear and correct if mailing. A mailed letter can be typed or handwritten. An e-mailed letter should be typed and addressed to the correct e-mail for the newspaper (usually provided in each issue of the paper itself). If you do not get a response or your letter does not get printed, contact the newspaper and send the letter again.

The writer: A letter to the editor can be written by one person or a group of people. The individual writer can craft a very personal letter to the editor explaining why the issue is important to them and their community. A group written letter can explain why the issue is important to them, what they have done regarding the issue, and how people can collaborate with their advocacy efforts.

Clear information about issues: Information will always be available at jrlc.org, though if you do not see something that you are looking for, you can contact us at 612-230-3200 or info@jrlc.org. Make extra information about the issues available for volunteers to share with others or to take home with them.