How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the Editor can serve the following purposes:
1. Comment on an article that appeared in the publication your letter is to.
2. Give information about an upcoming event.
3. Comment on a current issue.

Letters to the Editor are one of the most widely read sections of the newspaper and reach a large audience. They allow community members to comment on the way issues are being addressed and to influence what topics the local paper covers. Elected officials often monitor this section of the newspaper and take notice of constituents' opinions.

Most publications provide guidelines for writing letters to the editor. Look over the guidelines and follow them carefully. Make sure to include your name, address, e-mail, and phone number at the top of the letter. Your identity will be verified. Indicate if you do not want any personal information to be published.

If you are commenting on an article, make it clear what article you are responding to. Include the title and the date of publication of the article in the first sentence in the body of your letter. If you are giving information about an upcoming event or commenting on a current issue, describe the event or issue in the first sentence of your letter.

Write your letter immediately after an article on your topic appears; the longer you wait the less likely for your letter to be relevant or read. In your first paragraph, include the issue being discussed. In the second paragraph include supporting material, quotations and your expertise or qualifications. End with a strong but brief summary or statement.

Be clear and concise (250 words or less):
- Avoid going into tangents.
- Write in clear statements and maintain your voice, but avoid appearing emotional.
- Illustrate your point early in the letter.
- Avoid lengthy, complicated argument; you can lose your audience and appear incompetent.
- Avoid appearing emotional.
- Be professional.
- Avoid using offensive language.
- Write several drafts in order to condense your response or comment.
- Limit your letter to two or three paragraphs.

Proofread your letter. Editors will not read letters that contain poor grammar. Sending your letter by e-mail is recommended. It allows the editor to cut and paste your letter.