



A letter to the editor is also a form of opinion writing. It is simply much shorter and written in a different format from the opinion piece. In fact, most letters are no more than one page or 200-250 words. (You should check the requirements of the newspaper for whom you are writing to be certain!) Because a letter to the editor must be very brief, you must make the argument quickly and present only your strongest supporting points. Background information, quotations from other experts and texts, as well as less important supporting evidence are generally omitted.

In addition, you must put the text into a letter format which includes the following:

**Heading.** The first element of a letter is the heading, which consists of your address and the date. Give your complete address on the first line; the city, state, and ZIP code on the next line; and the date on the third line. The name of the state can be abbreviated using the standard two-letter abbreviation used by the U.S. postal service. The date should be written out completely, using the full name of the month. Here is a sample heading:

**210 Pleasantville Road  
Lakeview, CA 96346  
October 25, 2001**

**Inside Address.** After spacing at least twice, write the name, title, and complete address of the person who is to receive your letter. If you don't know, consult the newspaper where you plan to send the letter. Here is a sample inside address:

**Ms. Sandra Smith  
Editor  
Daily News  
100 Main Street  
Lakeview, CA 96346**

**Salutation or Greeting.** Space twice after the inside address and write "Dear \_\_\_\_\_:" (Note: The salutation is punctuated with a colon, not a comma, unless you know the person to whom you are writing.) For a man, use the title *Mr.*; for a woman, use *Ms.*, unless you know that the person prefers to be addressed by *Miss* or *Mrs.*

**Body.** Beginning two lines under the greeting, write the body of the letter. Letters are generally no more than four paragraphs long, each with a definite role to play in persuading your reader to consider your point. The first point generally explains the problem and your solution. The other paragraphs present your supporting evidence. Paragraphs in letters to the editor are usually short (no more than four sentences).

**Complimentary Close.** Two lines under the body of the letter, you will write one of several common closings, such as those listed below. Note that each is followed by a comma:

- **Sincerely,**
- **Sincerely yours,**
- **Yours truly,**
- **Respectfully,**

**Signature and Typed Name.** After the complimentary close, space down four lines and type your complete name. Write your signature in the blank space above your typed name.

Letters should also have an effective design. Design usually consists of the following:

**Layout.** There are two ways to format a letter: full-block style or semi-block style. In full-block style, all parts of the letter are aligned flush with the left margin. In semi-block style, the heading, complimentary close, and signature are aligned with each other and are placed right of the center of the page. In addition, in the semi-block style, the opening line of each paragraph can be indented five spaces.

The letter should have enough white space so that it is easy to read. Although paragraphs are single-spaced, you should double-space between paragraphs.

**Fonts and Point Sizes.** Choose a serif font that looks professionally typeset (such as Times New Roman) rather than typewritten (such as Courier). The usual point size is 12, though you could use 11 if doing so helps you keep the letter to one page.

**Paper and Printing.** Use white paper, and try to use a clean printer.