

Oklahoma Retired Educators Association

Writing Letters to the Editor

Writing letters to the editor can be an effective means of publicly stating a point of view or providing persuasive information about a specific issue.

1. **Pick a topic that you feel strongly about.** It could be a topic of general importance that the public should be aware of or it could relate to an issue that has been covered in the publication to which you are writing.
2. **Address** the letter “Dear Editor”. You will usually find the publication’s mailing address, e-mail address, and letters policy on its editorial page.
3. **Write clearly and concisely.** Avoid long, complicated sentences. Keep word choices simple and understandable. Be focused. Stick to one topic and do not ramble.
4. **Include your major points** in the first few sentences or paragraphs. These points are most likely to catch the reader’s attention. If the letter is edited before publication, it is probably the final part of the letter that will be cut.
5. **Short letters** are more likely to be published than long letters, and short letters are more likely to be read. Effective letters are seldom more than five paragraphs. Most publications have a size limit for letters to the editor.
6. **Be specific** about the points that you wish to make and give examples. Use facts and figures to back up your position.
7. **Make SURE that your letter is well written.** Be sure that it is grammatically correct and that words are spelled correctly. This is especially important when letters are written by educators or former educators! Do not expect the publication to correct spelling or grammatical errors for you. Most will not.

8. **Be polite.** Regardless of your letter's topic, be respectful to the publication, its staff, and to readers. When appropriate, be positive. Do not launch personal attacks. Do not use insulting language. Keep your letter within the bounds of good taste.
9. **Do not be emotional.** Keep the use of exclamation points to a minimum.
10. **Be careful with humor or satire.** It may not actually read the way that you intend. Avoid worn clichés and weak puns.
11. **Be prompt** if you are responding to an article that you have read. If you wait more than a few days, your topic will be old news!
12. **Proofread carefully!** Read the letter slowly out loud to yourself. Ask a trusted friend to read your letter and to provide input.
13. If possible, **type your letter.** Handwritten letters are more difficult to read, more prone to having errors in the publication process, and less likely to be used by the publication at all. Most publications allow you to submit your letter to the editor by e-mail. This eliminates their need to retype it.
14. **Sign your name and include your phone number and address** with the letter. Most publications will not print a letter that does not have a name, and many publications will call prior to publication to verify that you are the letter's actual writer.
15. If writing about a general topic, you may want to send your letter to **more than one publication.**
16. **Save a copy** of your letter.
17. Be aware that any publication has the right to print or reject any letter to the editor that they receive. For many publications, only a fraction of the letters that are received are published. **If your letter to the editor is not published, do not be discouraged.** Try again later or try another publication.