

# “Letters to the Editor” Training



Updated from Original 2017 Delaware United Presentation

## Writing a Letter to the Editor: The “Do’s”



- Research the publication’s requirements.
  - Is there a word limit?
  - Which kind of contact information is required?
  - Do the publication prefer submissions of letters in a certain format—via email, submitted through an online form, or mailed?
- Include your full name, telephone number, and address.
  - Most publications will not print “anonymous” letters.
  - Many publications require telephone verification of your identity.
- If you submit your letter via email, include “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line.
- Remember that most publications are more apt to publish letters written by readers who live in the geographic area commonly served by it.

## Writing a Letter to the Editor: The “Do’s”



- Make sure your letter’s content is timely.
- If applicable, reference a recent news story or editorial in the publication.
- Get to your point quickly. Consider stating your main idea in the very first sentence.
- Limit your content to one strong position and a few key points.
- Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Your tone should be rational, reasonable, informative, and forthright.
- Use easily-verifiable, relevant, high-level facts or statistics. Don’t get too granular.
- If you use a statistic, cite its source: “According to the CDC...”.
- Personalize the issue by explaining how it can affect the reader.
- Include any information highlighting your expertise on the issue.
- Maximize your words by avoiding unnecessary phrases like “I think...”.
- Use one space between sentences, not two spaces.
- Consider your audience, the reader of the publication. Suggest action that can be taken to improve the situation. Point people to a source for more information.
- Before submitting your letter, set it aside for a day, then come back to it. This is especially helpful for catching errors in tone, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Ask a trusted friend or relative to proofread your letter before submission.

## Writing a Letter to the Editor: The “Don’t’s”



- If possible, don't send the same letter to multiple publications. Publications want to print original content.
- Don't assume the reader knows as much about the subject as you do. You may need to offer a very high-level summary of the topic before offering your opinion on it.
- Avoid rambling or overstatement. One exaggeration negates the remainder of your points.
- Your tone should not be angry, accusatory, superior, or overzealous.
- Don't try to impress the reader with long words or flowery writing. Keep it simple and pointed. Focus on impressing the reader with your argument, not your style.

# Letters to the Editor: Example 1

Stating purpose in first sentence.

Dear Editor:

Reference to special expertise on the subject.

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.

Ending with a call to action.

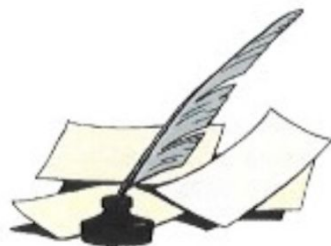
Our library has put several after-school programs in place to give students who are not doing homework something constructive to do. Other library customers have told us that they are surprised and delighted that the young people are so well-behaved. Teachers have called to say that some of their struggling 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.ourlibraries.com](http://www.ourlibraries.com).

Sincerely,

Bernie Doe  
123 American Court  
Newark, DE 19702  
302-456-7890

A reference to where readers can find more information.





# Letters to the Editor: Example 2

To the Editor:

The U.S. House of Representatives has recently proposed a law (H.R. no. 396) that will ban the sale of cigarettes from vending machines. This is a landmark piece of legislation that everyone in our community should support right now.

Many people don't realize it, but vending machines are one of the main places that children are able to purchase cigarettes. In fact, it is estimated that 10% of all cigarettes purchased by minors take place at these machines. If this new legislation goes into effect, it will not only make it more difficult for youth to break the law by buying cigarettes, it will lower the chances of young people smoking in the first place.

There are many reasons (besides the legal ones) why we should try to curb smoking by our children. First, research shows that most people who smoke started when they were underage. Second, many people fear that smoking cigarettes serves as a "gateway" to harder drugs. Third, smoking is a very expensive addiction (particularly for a teen who makes minimum wage). Finally, smoking can cause many life-shortening or fatal health problems. Our young people would not smoke before they are really able to understand or accept the long-term consequences.

The vending-machine bill has been proposed, but now it needs to be passed. Your voice will count here. We encourage you to write or call the representative for your district (for those of us in District 8, that's Congresswoman Fisher) and let her know that you support her as she tries to get this legislation passed. The more support she gets, the more likely it is that this bill will become law. Contact Tobacco Free Youth for further information about this important issue.

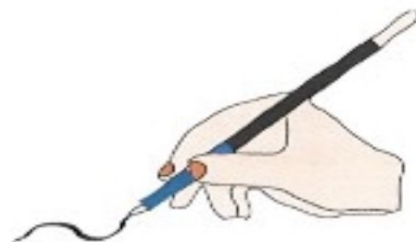
Sincerely,

Jane Smith  
456 Anywhere Drive  
Wilmington, DE 19808  
302-234-5678

← The writer's full name and contact information.

Simple and useful statistic.

Easy to read, sequential list of arguments.



# Letters to the Editor: Example 3

To Whom It May Concern:

I am outraged by the County Commission's recent decision to terminate the lease of the Head Start program at the County Court House. With this decision, a much-needed, already under-funded program may simply vanish.

The writer's tone is forthright and factual.

Head Start is a fantastic program. It makes sure that poor and other at-risk pre-school children will have the nutritious food and special attention they just may not get elsewhere. It gives these children a true "head start" in a world where they may not get many other chances. And there is plenty of evidence to show that Head Start makes a big difference to children later in life—all of our children, yours and mine.

The Commission's recent decision to oust the program to make more room for a "state Gifts Shop" is ridiculous. If the leaders of our community would like to run a store to sell Kansas-made goods, I'm all for it. However, neither my Kansas pride nor my greed run so deep as to wish to take away the breakfast of thirty hungry three-year-olds. And I am deeply saddened to see that the County Commissioners value profits over people.

This decision is shameful to all who live in Dade County. The County Commissioners should reconsider the situation and revoke their decision immediately. I hope all readers will let the commissioners know how they feel about this terrible situation by calling them at 913-432-1200, or writing to them at the County Court House.

Sincerely,

Anita Revolution  
999 First State Way  
Dover, DE 19901  
302-789-1234

Personalizing the issue to show how it can affect the reader.

One space—not two—between sentences.



# Publications

## Statewide

Publication	Word Limit	Website or Email for Submission
News Journal/Del Online	250	<a href="https://static.delawareonline.com/submitletter/">https://static.delawareonline.com/submitletter/</a>
El Tiempo Hispano	n/a	<a href="mailto:editor@eltimpohsipano.com">editor@eltimpohsipano.com</a>
Bay to Bay News	250	<a href="https://baytobaynews.com/forms/letters/">https://baytobaynews.com/forms/letters/</a>
Hoy en Delaware	n/a	<a href="mailto:news@hoyendelaware.com">news@hoyendelaware.com</a>



# Publications

## Sussex County

Publication	Word Limit	Website or Email for Submission
Cape Gazette	500	newsroom@capegazette.com
Coastal Point	500	<a href="https://www.coastalpoint.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/">https://www.coastalpoint.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/</a>
Delmarva Now	500	opinions@delmarvanow.com
High Tide News (Millsboro)	n/a	news@hightidenews.com
Morning Star Publications	n/a	mmcclure@mpublications.com
Sussex County Post	n/a	sussexpost@newszap.com

# Publications

## New Castle County

Publication	Word Limit	Website or Email for Submission
Greenville Online	250	<a href="https://static.greenvilleonline.com/letterstoeditor/">https://static.greenvilleonline.com/letterstoeditor/</a>
Hockessin Community News	n/a	Editor@communitypub.com
Middletown Transcript	n/a	shauna@middletowntranscript
Newark Post	400	letters@newarkpostonline.com
The Review (UD)	n/a	eic@udreview.com

# Publications

## Kent County

Publication	Word Limit	Website or Email for Submission
Dover Post	250	editor@doverpost.com
Milford Beacon	250	editor@milfordbeacon.com
Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times	250	editor@scsuntimes.com
Milford Chronicle	500	newsroom@iniusa.org
The Journal (Harrington)	250	journal@newszap.com