

Guide to Writing an Effective Letter-to-the-Editor in 20 Minutes *Gun Violence & Public Health*

Editors pay attention to well-written, succinct letters that respond to an article just published. Here are some tips to get your letter written and published:

Check Submission Guidelines in Your Local Paper

Look for the submission link on the Opinion page of your paper's website. Copy and paste your letter in the body of an email or submission form. Do not send attachments. Follow up with a call 24 hours after you submit to confirm receipt of your letter and ask about a usual timeframe for hearing back on a decision. Ask for the Letters editor.

Be Brief & Get to the Point

Do not waste the first paragraph building up to your point. Start off with a strong value statement, a big idea: saving lives, protection, safety. Then get into specifics: universal background checks, getting military assault weapons off the street, the impact of violence on communities, need for evidence-based approaches to reducing gun violence, etc..

Decide What Approach You Want to Take

- Praise an article, or at least the reporter's attention to an important topic
- Appeal to your authority and expertise.
- Informational- use article as opportunity provide more info and insight or an upcoming event.
- Set the record straight, if needed.

Structure for an LTE

HEADING: Today's Date

RE: "Headline of article you are responding to," Date of article

OPENING: "To the editor:" OR "Dear Editor,"

BODY: Keep short, note word count limit. 2-3 short paragraphs. max.

CLOSING:

Your full name

City, State

Your phone and address (if requested by paper).

Letter to the Editor Template

Date you are submitting LTE

Re: "Title of article you are responding to," date article was published

Dear Editor,

FIRST SENTENCE ESTABLISH REASON FOR WRITING

The epidemic of gun violence has gripped our country in sad and devastating ways. Last month we saw another in a brutal display of efficient, deadly violence that took 17 innocent lives, and left scars on the bodies and psyches of many, many more. I agree/disagree with the author of this article that _____.

INSERT 1-2 SENTENCES ABOUT YOUR OWN INSIGHT AS A PHYSICIAN

As a physician, I have had to tell parents their child is dead. I have had to work with the ongoing long-term consequences for families that survive a shooting: injuries, disfigurement, rehab, depression, and struggle. I see every day the impact of continued gun violence in my community. I have had enough and that is why I am speaking up.

INSERT ANY KIND OF SUPPORTING FACT OR DATA

If you think this isn't an epidemic, think again. Consider that between 1955 and 1975, the Vietnam war killed more than 58,000 American soldiers. But that number is far fewer than the number of civilians killed with guns in the US in an average two-year period.

CLOSING

It is way past time for our country to take common sense approaches to gun violence prevention. If even our own law enforcement officials support universal background checks, along with the vast majority of the American public, then isn't it time for our policymakers to do what is right before we lose any more innocent lives?

Sincerely,

Jane Q. Public, MD

[contact info - not used for publishing but for verification purposes]

Address, City/State

Zip

Phone

Email