

Action Guide

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

If you or your group feel strongly about an issue and want to have your say, there are many ways in which you can express your opinion.

Writing a letter to the editor is one way you can bring attention to an issue. It can be part of a list of tools you use to express your opinions, along with other tools such as a media interview or writing a media release.

What makes a good letter?

A good letter is usually no more than 200 words and is addressed to the editor of a newspaper or magazine. It should be about an issue that is current in the news or something that people are talking about.

Almost every newspaper or magazine has a letters section where people can write and share their views.

While there are no guarantees, a letter that is well written, current and interesting is more likely to get published. Letters that are too long or hard to read may not be printed or may be shortened to fit in the space allowed. Make sure that you keep to the point.

Where do I start?

If you're not sure how to begin, look at the letters to the editor section in your local newspaper or magazine. This can help you get ideas and will usually provide their rules for accepting letters. Have a look at the articles in the paper – what are they saying about the issue?

Think about the following questions:

- What issues are the articles talking about?
- Are there lots of articles on the issue?
- What are people saying about this issue?
- What is your opinion about the issue – do you have a different view to what others are saying?

Being a young person, you already offer a different view because most articles will be written by adults.

If there is an article or a letter written by someone that you disagree with, then start writing. It is always best to write your letter as soon as possible and send it in while the issue is still fresh in everyone's minds.

Plan your letter to the editor

Check out the letters to the editor section in your newspaper or magazine. Think about:

1. How are these letters written?
2. What issues are they talking about?
3. Do you agree/disagree/feel strongly about any of these issues?

This will help you get an idea of the kind of letters that are being published and what issues are current.

When you are clear about the issue you want to focus on, go through your local newspaper or magazine and read all the articles you can find on it to give background for your letter.

Remember to take note of the name of the newspaper or magazine you found the articles in and the date they were printed.

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MINISTRY OF
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATU WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

Writing your letter

If you want to start some discussion on a particular topic, or respond to a letter or article in your newspaper, mention what article you are responding to and the date it was published, so readers and the editor know what you are writing about.

If you are writing about a letter someone else has written, mention the date it was printed, the issue it talked about and the name of the person who wrote it.

- Focus on one main point and write the facts.
- Keep it brief. Write short paragraphs with no more than three sentences per paragraph. A good rule is one idea per sentence.
- Write your name and full address at the bottom of your letter. They won't print your full address but this is needed in case they want to follow up with you.
- It is always good to have someone else check your spelling and grammar. It's amazing what a fresh pair of eyes can pick up.

EXAMPLE

Dear Editor

I was disappointed to read your article on 10 May "Young people don't care". I am tired of reading stories labeling all young people as uncaring, lazy or selfish, when this is just not true!

As a young person, I play tennis and netball, help out as a mentor for my fellow students and do volunteer work in my community. I also care about my family and friends, and I am passionate about issues that affect New Zealand. It is not that young people don't care what's happening, it's that adults don't ask or don't want to listen to what young people have to say!

Joanne Bloggs
123 Alphabet St
(Remember, they won't print your street address, just your town.)
Town/City

Checklist

Before you post, fax or email your letter, check again that you have:

- read it through and checked the spelling and grammar
- given it to someone else to proofread
- kept it short – under 200 words
- included your name and contact details
- covered your main points.

Sending off your letter

You can post, fax or email your letter and address it to the editor.

Newspapers and magazines usually put all their contact details in the same place/page of every issue. If you can't find the contact details, look in the phone book.

Check the newspaper or magazine to see if your letter is printed. If it still hasn't been printed after two weeks, contact the editorial department to see what happened.

Even if your letter doesn't get published, don't give up! If there are other issues you feel strongly about, keep writing!

DON'T GIVE UP! KEEP WRITING!