

# How to Write a Letter to the Editor



Writing a letter to the editor to your local news outlet is one of the most effective ways to draw the attention of your elected officials and raise public awareness about an issue. Congressional staff monitor media hits for their offices every day.

Every letter to the editor makes an impact, even if it's not published. The more feedback a news outlet receives on libraries, the better they understand that libraries are newsworthy to their readers.

**Choosing a news outlet:** When it comes to persuading decision makers, news outlets that have a critical place in your local or statewide community can have an even greater impact than larger, national news outlets. Small-circulation newspapers publish a majority of the letters they receive. To move the needle on an issue, we encourage you to aim for a local audience.

Below is a general structure you can use to help you craft a letter to the editor. Be sure to consult the unique guidelines for word count and other specifications of your chosen news outlet before writing your letter.

## 1. Introduce the issue.

State why you are writing the letter. If you are responding to a specific news article, directly address that article or its author.

**Example:** *I'm writing in response to your article "A Bill was Introduced" published on May 10, about bill #1234 that was just introduced in the U.S. Senate.*

## 2. Use a personal example and/or local statistics.

Share why you, your family, or your community are personally connected to this issue. Support this with statistics, preferably local. If you do not have a personal story or local statistics, cite a local or state-specific story.

**Example:** *This bill would make it much harder for me and other veterans in rural communities to access healthcare. Before the library opened its private telehealth kiosks, I had to travel 70 miles to the nearest V.A. hospital. If the library were to reduce staff or lose funding to maintain high-speed internet, I would have to take a day off work and lose a day's pay to see my doctor.*



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### 3. Close with a call to action.

Tell your representative(s) what exactly you want to do to support libraries. Reaffirm the main point, offer a solution to the problem, and reinforce how important this is to you.

**Example:** *I'm urging my senators [Name and Name] and Representative [Name] to oppose Bill #1234 in any way possible. I depend on the program the bill would eliminate for my livelihood.*

Then follow the news outlet's submission instructions!



**Waiting and re-submitting:** Once you've hit send or submit, wait at least seven days before re-submitting it somewhere else. Do not submit the same letter to multiple outlets at the same time: news editors want exclusive content, and will not print something that's already published elsewhere. If you submit the same letter to multiple outlets simultaneously, you may be blacklisted. A seven-day grace period should be safe, and you're free to try again somewhere else: persistence is key.

### What's next? Amplify your message!

Once you submit your letter, email the same message to your Congressmembers (at [congress.gov/contact-us](https://congress.gov/contact-us)) and tell them where you've sent it to underscore your passion and the potential reach of your involvement.

If your Letter to the Editor gets published, multiply the impact:

- Share the article link broadly on social media, tag your Congressmembers wherever they have an account, and urge them to show up **#ForOurLibraries**. (Use this hashtag so ALA sees your posts!)
- Ask friends, family, and fellow library lovers to comment on your letter on the media outlet's page.
  - Content that elicits engagement from readers will become a higher priority for news editors, who decide what issues to cover.



### Looking for more ways to get involved?

Visit [ala.org/ShowUp](https://ala.org/ShowUp) for a collection of resources you can use to Show Up For Our Libraries every day!