

Drafting Letters to the Editor to Enhance Your Advocacy

Anatomy of a Letter to the Editor

Typically, letters to the editor accomplish a great deal in just 150-300 words by including the following:

- **An introduction:** Start by identifying the article or opinion piece to which your letter responds. This should ideally be woven together with an assertion that grabs the reader's attention. Additionally, provide relevant background information on your role or perspective in the community.

Example: If readers were surprised by the shortage of caregivers for elderly members of our community since the COVID-19 pandemic ("Caring for Whom?," April 11), they'll be shocked to learn that disabled Bostonians have been grappling with this crisis for more than three decades. As the CEO of a nonprofit that supports people with disabilities, I can attest to turnover rates among direct support professionals that have hovered around 45% since the early 2000s.

- **Your story:** Briefly describe the issue and your point of view. What have you, your colleagues, or the people you support experienced? Why is it significant? Keep in mind that brevity is important, but don't assume that readers have the same level of background knowledge that you have.
- **Evidence:** The bar for what constitutes evidence isn't as high in this context as it can be in other contexts. However, your argument will be viewed more credibly by readers—and the editor who decides whether your letter will be published—if it's backed by evidence. Evidence comes in many forms—anecdotes, testimonials, facts, statistics and more. Give some thought to how you will lend credibility to your claims.
- **A statement of opinion or call to action:** If the previous elements of your letter explain the "what," you want to close by articulating "so what" and "now what." End with a bold declaration of your opinion or the action you want to see taken by lawmakers, regulators or other parties.

Pro Tips for Crafting Your Letter to the Editor

- **Respond to what's relevant:** Though not always the case, many opinion editors are seeking to publish letters that engage the merits of an argument presented previously by the news outlet or one of its readers. Finding an article or opinion piece published by the outlet to which you can respond can help your letter stand out.
- **Follow the rules:** Each news outlet has its own parameters regarding letters to the editor. These include everything from the maximum word count to the way the letter should be submitted. Choosing not to follow these guidelines significantly diminishes the odds that your letter will be published.