



Letters to The Editor: A How-to Guide

Why letters?

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are a traditional method of sharing thoughts and ideas on a variety of subjects. And while newspapers today are not in the same position they were 20 years ago, their opinion pages – both online and in print – remain significant to civic discussions.

Newspapers' op-ed (opinion-editorial) pages, where LTEs are published, are both a conveyor and barometer of public sentiment. They are often watched by policymakers and other “thought leaders.” Thus, LTEs can still play a substantial role in shaping civic discussions, helping demonstrate support and building momentum for change – such as bolstering early care and education for Illinois' young children. LTEs represent one more demonstration of public will.

Drafting and submitting a LTE for publication is not difficult and can be very helpful in pursuing our shared goals for early childhood care and education.

Getting started

First, get an understanding of the amount of space you have to work with. Most newspapers limit LTE submissions to a certain length – typically, a maximum of 250 or 300 words. Check your intended news outlet's website for its specific guidelines; usually, they can be found under “opinion” and/or “letters to the editor” tabs. Here are examples from:

[The Chicago Tribune](#)

[The State Journal-Register \(Springfield\)](#)

[The Journal Star \(Peoria\)](#)

[The Southern Illinoisan \(Carbondale\)](#)

Every paper has its own, individual guidelines. But whatever the specific word-count rule, one lesson applies: **Briefer is better; shorter letters generally face a greater chance of publication.**

Three Tips for writing your LTE

Your voice counts! Use it!

When writing, speak from own experience and connect it with matters at the community, state, and/or national levels. Your personal and/or professional perspective are important; they have informed the stance you are taking in this piece, and they deserve to be shared! Whether you're a parent of young children lacking adequate services, a teacher or child care provider frustrated at shortcomings in fully meeting needs, a local civic leader who sees community struggles ... any role that you play has a valuable angle on the significance of early care and education.

Keep it relevant

Speaking of making connections – demonstrating connections between your LTE topic and current affairs is a good way to maximize your chances of publication, not to mention enhancing the letter's relevancy. Here are just a few examples of timely “hooks” that can be used:

- “The COVID crisis has shown, more than ever, how important child care is to the well-being of our workforce and economy...”
- “I recently saw a statistic about local kindergarteners’ lack of readiness for entering school prepared for success...”
- “The Governor has created a commission that’s studying these early childhood matters and working on some important recommendations for improvement...”

In addition, sometimes an LTE can be written to specifically reference a news story or another opinion piece that’s already run in the intended news outlet, and this can provide a strong “hook.” For example, “Your June 15 news story on the challenge of reopening preschools got me thinking about unmet early childhood needs...”

Strike a balance

Try to touch on both sides of the coin, not only problems but solutions. In this case, “solutions” can be covered by stating the need to find and pursue solutions that work for young children and their families – the need to unite in commitment to enacting such solutions.

Submitting your LTE

The same set of guidelines that specified word-count requirements should also spell-out the intended news outlet’s preferences for submitting your letter. Sometimes, writers are asked to complete an online form, into which they can paste the text of their LTE. Other times, an email address is provided; in these situations, it’s often better to paste your LTE text into the body of your email rather than to attach it in document form. In nearly all cases, writers are asked to provide their email address and telephone number for editors to use in verifying authorship; this info is not for actual publication.

Maximizing your impact

Publication of an LTE is not the end; in some ways, it’s just a beginning! There are several further steps you can take to increase its likelihood of being read and making a positive difference, including:

- [Sending it to your policymakers](#), to ensure they know how you feel and to ask them to act.
- [Sharing it on social media](#), to help inform your friends and colleagues and to suggest they, too, speak-up.
- [Forwarding it to members of the Governor’s Early Childhood Funding Commission](#), to encourage and thank them for their work to pursue improvements in early childhood services.