



Letters to the Editor vs. Op-Eds

Both are opinion pieces that are forms of free media. That's where the similarities end.

Letters to the Editor

- Shorter, generally no more than 250 words
- A response to an article or editorial that has recently been published in that publication.
- Newspapers can publish multiple letters on any given topic
- Writers can be anyone wishes to express an opinion
- A letter to the editor is more likely to be published as there is more space in the publication allotted for letters

Op-Eds

- Longer, generally between 400 and 800 words. Varies by publication.
- Subject matter should be on something timely and relevant.
- Newspapers will only publish one version of an opposing view point
- Writers must be an expert in the topic their op-ed is about and offer new information
- Given the length of an op-ed, newspapers will typically only publish one or two on a given day.

TIPS:

1. A newspaper will not publish what has been submitted elsewhere so choose your publications wisely.
2. Include your name, phone number, e-mail address, and mailing address. The newspaper will likely contact you to verify your identity as the writer.
3. Check with your newspaper to verify their policies.
4. Be short and to the point.
5. AVOID JARGON!!
6. When using facts and numbers, use only one or two, and choose the most powerful.
7. People don't read letters to the editor for an in-depth policy discussion. They want to know about a personal connection to an issue affecting their community. Newspapers won't print something that speaks in general terms, you have share an example or personal story so write from the heart.
8. Make a call to action. A letter to the editor is far more impactful when it motivates others to act.
9. Check for grammar and spelling before submitting.
10. If you get published, make sure to share your letter on Facebook, Twitter, and any other form of social media you use. E-mail it to all your networks including the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey.

SAMPLE TEMPLATE

Below is a sample template to help you structure your letter.

[Name of Outlet or Publication]

Attn: [Editor of Publication]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[City, ST ZIP]

Dear Editor: [If you are responding to or referencing another article, you should reference it by writing the first sentence, then the title of the article, the name of the publication & finally the date it was published. If not, you can start here with the reason why you're writing, but it's not always necessary. Sometimes it's best to include some kind of interesting hook here that also explains why you're writing without saying "I'm writing because..."]

[Tell your personal story in this second section. How has the issue impacted you, your family, or someone you know? Or why is this issue important to you? What are the impacts of the issue on people in your community? Remember to be concise, draw a local connection, and relate to the community you know best by touching on the values you share with them. If you include contrast—what the opponents think—be respectful.]

[So now what? Are you encouraging readers to contact their legislator? Are you asking them to take some other action? Don't be afraid to make a specific ask of the people reading your letter.]

[End on a positive note. You have gone to all this trouble to entice your readers, you don't want to turn them off to your opinions before you've sealed the deal.]

Sincerely, [YOUR NAME] [YOUR CITY, ST, Month DD, YYYY]

**For assistance writing your "Build a Thriving New Jersey" letters, please contact Nina Arce at narce@hcdnnj.org.*