How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Your local paper may write on your issue regularly. This is a great opportunity to spread the word. Letters to the Editor are short responses to something that appeared in the paper. Each paper has their own rules around submitting letters, but a good rule of thumb is to keep it short and to the point.

An op-ed is usually 750 words or less (roughly 2 to 3 pages double spaced). In order to increase the likelihood of publication, it is important to make an op-ed punchy and assertive. You do not need to be extremely formal in your language; a conversational tone is more amusing to read. Do keep in mind, however, that this is an opportunity to clearly assert your perspective, so do not equivocate.

Before you even begin writing, determine your goal and your audience. Are you hoping to increase recognition of your name? Attract new members and volunteers? Encourage people to support new cost of living guidelines? Once you have pinpointed your goal, determine whom you want to reach.

Do you want to target business leaders? Policymakers? Other non-profit organizations?

When you are ready to write, open your op-ed with what would normally be the conclusion of a standard essay. You want to make your strongest point first (ideally summarized in one clear sentence), and then support that point throughout the body of the article. Use facts, research, and firsthand information/experience to educate the reader and support your point of view. Make your points compelling. Your goal is to make someone e-mail his or her friend and say, “Hey, did you see that op-ed in today’s paper?”

Once you have completed your op-ed, remember to include one or two sentences identifying the signer, your phone number, e-mail address and mailing address. Check your local newspaper’s website to learn how to submit an op-ed. Newspapers often accept op-eds via e-mail. It is important to submit an op-ed to only one publication at a time however, as all op-eds are exclusive to a single outlet. Once you submit your op-ed, wait at least a week to see if it is accepted before submitting to another publication. Many newspapers do not respond to every person who submits an op-ed. If you do not hear from the paper after a week, it is safe to assume that they are not interested.

See the enclosed sample to get an idea of what an EESI op-ed might look like. Remember, though, to write an original op-ed for your preferred outlet. Newspapers keep track of op-eds that are published elsewhere so it’s important that partners do not submit the same op-ed copy to multiple newspapers.

To find out more about how to advocate for elder economic security, please visit wowonline.org or contact Matt Unrath at (202) 464-1596 or munrath@wowonline.org.
To the Editor:

Making ends meet as a retired single mother living on Social Security has never been tougher. I have to battle the rising costs of health care, housing and other services on a daily basis, making the threat of not making ends meet an ever-present reality.

After receiving my social security check of $800 and paying my bills, I have about $200 remaining to sustain me and to help my family when I can for the entire month. As a law-abiding citizen who has bought into the system and paid her dues to society, I know I deserve more. The 43 million individuals living in poverty, 8.9% of which are seniors, deserve more.

The government should recognize the tremendous need for establishing economic security for elders, because at its current rate, more and more seniors living on Social Security are being pushed into poverty. Congress must incorporate benefits for seniors into their policy decisions, such as the inclusion of long-term care provisions into the national health care program. Furthermore, the government must expand Unemployment Insurance and job placement programs specifically targeted towards seniors. Living above poverty should not be considered a luxury; economic security should be a right for all.

Championing a system that allows elders like me to face the looming threat of economic insecurity is both unjust and immoral on behalf of policy makers.

Your name
Your address
Daytime telephone number