



WRITE WELL WITH NQT!

Letter to the editor

Students: Please keep this handout for future reference. Your tutor will go through the different parts of this handout and then you will be required to write one yourself.

What is a letter to the editor?

A letter to the editor is an example of a formal letter expressing an opinion, a complaint, an argument or giving information.

What is the purpose of a letter to the editor?

The purpose of a letter to the editor is to express your individual view and hopefully persuade your readers to your opinion about a current issue. Letters to the editor are published in nearly all magazines and newspapers. Anybody can write a letter to the editor, but generally, the people who write letters to the editor are those who are passionate about particular and topical issues.

What is the overall “tone” or “voice” of a letter to the editor?

The tone can be informal or formal, depending on where the letter is being published. This is because the audience is the readership of any given publication is different for every newspaper or magazine. A letter published in *The Economist* or *Time* is likely to have an extremely formal tone, whereas letters to the editor published in the *Herald Sun* can have various tones, dependent on the audience that the writer of the letter is targeting.

What are the main language features of a letter to the editor?

- A letter to the editor is an expression of opinion on a subject that has two sides to it (usually one that has been recently in the news)
- A letter to the editor is a **persuasive text**, with the aim to express views to a wider public.
- Effective letters to the editor **rely on fact** as well as opinion.
- Letters to the editor are often responses to articles from the particular publication that writers are writing to, or in response to other letters to the editor.
- Always start with ‘To the Editor,’ and then leave a line.
- Sign off briefly, with either your initials or your first initial and last name and suburb.

Hints for writing effective letters to the editor

- The secret to writing good letters to the editor is to combine **persuasive language with well researched evidence**.
- Short, concise letters are more likely to be published than longer, waffling letters (**around 200 words is a good maximum length**).
- While some letters to the editor are composed in an informal tone, keeping a formal tone will help your letters to carry an air of authority.
- If you compose a letter to the editor on a subject that you know very well, be careful to not use jargon and technical terms unless you are absolutely sure that your intended audience will understand them.
- The use of the **first person** is standard for letters to the editor.
- **Persuasive techniques are necessary for this task**. You are trying to persuade people to see your point of view. This means that you can use a tone that is outraged, happy or interested. It also means that a number of persuasive techniques can be employed.

Structure and format

Introduction

- Briefly outline the issue that you are writing about.
- Include your opinion.

Body

- Explain your opinion.
- Give evidence for your opinion.

Conclusion

- Restate opinion.

Sample letters to the editor

Education

I do not support or condemn the actions of the school in the Australian Capital Territory which erected a metal structure to contain a child with special needs – “Autistic child put in cage in class” (The Age, 3/4). This demonstrates that schools, teachers and principals are at their wits end with how to deal with the out-of-control behaviour of more and more pupils.

Kicking, biting, spitting, hitting, swearing, throwing things and other violent actions, along with outright defiance and disobedience, are perpetrated on other children and teachers on a daily basis in primary schools. Then, when the parents are called in, they often say their child “would not do anything like that” and they want to know what the “other kid” did and/or what his or her punishment will be.

Part of the problem is the lack of experienced, mature-aged teachers in schools because of the way the global budget works. Principals are more or less forced into hiring young teachers at the expense of experienced ones because of the difference in their salaries. I no longer teach in the school system. Instead, I spend three days a week teaching young adults who are in Australia to learn English. Bliss.

Susan Livsey, Box Hill

Terrible abuse of students with disabilities

The abuse of students with disabilities by locking them up, or restraining them, at school is not news any more, unfortunately. What is news is that a senior government official is taking the matter seriously and undertaking an investigation.

In Victoria, every report of restraint or seclusion that I have been involved in, and there have been many, has been defended by the regional director/deputy secretary as being appropriate. The basis for such a judgment is that students with autism are demonised by the Education Department as being “aggressive” and “violent”, rather than experiencing challenging behaviours due to an inappropriate environment.

Until Australia’s departments of education change their attitude towards children with autism spectrum disorder, most states will continue to have high levels of abuse in schools. Regrettably, Victoria is one of the leading states in defending these practices.

Julie Phillips, disability advocate, Fairfield

Teacher’s duty to protect their entire class

There are two sides to every story. I have heard of some very distressing instances where teachers had to cope with some special needs children who had violent and physically aggressive. In some cases, the other children in their primary class were injured or put at risk. We should spare a thought for these teachers who have the welfare of their whole class to consider.

Kerry Brown, Docklands