Advocate for Science:
Writing a Letter to the Editor

What is a letter to the editor?

A letter to the editor is a response to a published article. It offers readers the opportunity to publicly express their opinions and further the conversation on a given topic. It is typically short and concise.

How will writing a letter to the editor make an impact?

Writing a letter to the editor on the impact of scientific research and the importance of investing in science can help raise public awareness regarding the ramifications of funding cuts. By presenting insights and stories from real scientists, we can emphasize the value of science funding and encourage the broader public to place increased pressure on policymakers.

How to write a letter the editor of a local newspaper:

1. Identify a recent article in a local paper surrounding a topic(s) that could be relevant to science or healthcare

Read your local newspaper and identify an article of interest. Remember that your representative's office also reads them. Be encouraged that others likely share similar interests and desire an expert's opinion.

2. Complete additional research on the article you chose

Confirm that what was reported in the article you chose is true and accurate. Then, prepare references to confirm or reject this information.

3. Make a list of the main points you would like to cover

Your letter should be short, concise and early to the point. Make sure to provide evidence for your argument.

4. Read over previously published letters and paper requirements

Review your local and national newspaper's editorial section to get a better sense of the paper's requirements for publication. For example:
https://www.thetimes.com/article/c2ee93e4-0dbe-4306-8e3a-face3f982a42

5. Write your first draft

Formulate your draft for a 6th - 8th grade reading level and avoid science jargon as much as possible. Example of a general letter to the editor:
https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/letter-editor-template

6. Reach out for feedback on your letter

Share the letter with your peers, colleagues, mentor, and people outside of science. Allow them to review your work and be receptive to constructive criticism

7. Check in with your university/workplace regarding publishing with affiliation

Guidelines can often be found on your institution's website. A simple email to your media coordinator or HR can clear up confusion on whether you can publish with institutional affiliation or as an independent scientist and concerned citizen.

8. Revise and submit!

Make sure the formatting is correct. Run your letter through a grade level readability checker: https://hemingwayapp.com/readability-checker. And finally, be proud that you are impacting science for the better!

Notes:

- **Make sure to check your university or employer's guidelines before sending your letter to a newspaper or journal.** You might need to publish as a general classification like "scientist", or "pharmacologist".
- Not every letter to the editor will be published. Therefore, it is important to spend time on the letter to ensure high quality and increase the chance it is featured.
    - Even if your letter does not get published, the more newspapers hear from local scientists, the more they realize that this is an important issue to the local community.
- Shorter is generally better.
- Make your letter unique and personal to catch reader attention. Bring in your own expertise and experiences .
- Letters to the editor are different from op-eds which are longer and do not respond to a particular publication.
- More resources on writing letter to the editors for science funding:
    - https://www.coalitionforlifesciences.org/writing-a-letter-to-the-editor/
    - https://www.ucs.org/resources/writing-effective-letter-editor

If your letter is published, please email us with the link at publicaffairs@aspet.org. We would like to feature these letters on the ASPET website to provide inspiration for others to continue writing!