

## Voicing Your Views: Letter to the Editor

Adapted from the lesson  
developed by Maria Byck

### Overview:

The media is not a one-way street—it is always possible to write or otherwise respond to something you hear, see or read in the media. Students will be invited to examine a newspaper’s editorial section—the section where letters to the editor and newspaper staff editorials appear—and to explore the differences between the editorial section and articles in other sections of the newspaper and between fact and opinion. Through careful consideration of the editorial section of the newspaper, students will be encouraged to discuss what this section is and why it is important.

**Aim:** For students to explore the editorial section of the newspaper and understand what it is

**Objectives:** At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- explain the difference between an editorial piece and other newspaper articles or features.
- identify the importance of the editorial section in a newspaper.
- differentiate between fact and opinion.
- support opinion and argument with factual evidence.
- write a letter to the editor.

**Target group:** GED

**Length:** One two-hour session

**Vocabulary:** editor, fact, opinion, agreement, opposition, evidence

**Materials and Resources:**

- copies of editorial pages from the local newspaper for each student group
- copies of today’s local newspaper
- copies of Handout 1: “Letter to the Editor Worksheet”

**Teacher’s Notes:**

This lesson further develops skills that were introduced in the *Editorial Choices: Deciding What’s Important* lesson, which gives students an overview of the entire newspaper and all the sections. Students will be better able to compare and contrast fact and opinion if they have spent some time working with newspapers as a whole.

## Activities:

1. Brainstorm with the class the difference between fact and opinion and write the definitions on the board. Agree on working definitions as a group. Divide students into small groups and distribute copies of the editorial page to each group. Ask them to read through the articles, allowing them sufficient time to read the editorials and letters to the editor. Ask the groups to respond to the following questions:
  - How is this section different from other sections of the newspaper?
  - Who wrote these articles? Why is this section important?
  - Do you agree with all the perspectives expressed in the editorials and letters to the editor?
2. Hand out today's newspaper to the groups. Ask students to look through the paper and find an article about which they have a strong opinion and to which they will respond by writing a letter to the editor. The groups should discuss the article at length, identifying the key arguments in preparation for writing their letter to the editor. Each group should make a list of all the points they would like to make in their letter. Remind students that a letter to the editor can be either in agreement with or in opposition to an article. For example, there may be an article about the mayor's plan to reform the schools. The students' letter could express support for the plan and give reasons for their approval. It could express appreciation that the news story explains the situation so clearly. The letter could also disagree with the proposal and spell out the ways in which it will be bad for both teachers and students. But whether supporting or opposing, it is important that the letter justifies the writer's opinions with factual evidence and well-reasoned arguments.
3. Distribute Handout 1, "Letter to the Editor Worksheet," to each student. Using this worksheet as a guide, ask students to write a letter to the editor about the article they discussed in their group. If students have access to the Internet, they can research facts and information to support their view. Also remind students that when a newspaper selects a letter for publication, it reserves the right to edit the letter for length and clarity. So if students want their ideas expressed in their own words, they should keep their letter concise and to the point. Invite students to read their letter to the class.

## Follow-up:

Many magazines, online publications and other media also provide people with opportunities to respond to their publications through a letter to the editor. Using the same format of the letter to the editor, students can write a letter to a network, a news reporter, an advertiser, a radio station, a corporation, a nonprofit organization, a political association and more.

Letter to the Editor Handout 1

“Letter to the Editor Worksheet”

Letters to the Editor

[Newspaper name]

[Newspaper Address, Fax or Email]

*(Note: You can usually find where to send your letter to the editor on the paper's editorial page.)*

[Date]

Dear Editor:

First Paragraph: Begin by referring to a previously published article in the newspaper or to a well-known event or issue to help set the stage for whatever point you are going to make. Following your opening sentence, you should immediately begin to state why you are writing the letter.

Second Paragraph: If the news story that was written missed an important point, say so and explain why it is important. If a news event did not provide the full story, give the full story. If someone gave an explanation that was unclear or misleading, clarify the point for the newspaper's readers.

Final Paragraph: Your conclusion should include some call to action for the general public.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

[Address]

[Daytime Phone Number]