

# How to Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

---



## Before you pick up your pen...

### Step 1. Choose Your Topic

Your letter is meant to be a response to a published article. It could be an piece relating to an execution, a legislative push, a death penalty-related statement from an elected official, or another event or issue in the community.

Responding to a specific article in a community publication is one of the best ways to ensure your LTE is published.

### Step 2. Read Other Letters to The Editor

Before you write your LTE, read other LTEs to become familiar with the different forms, styles, tones, and even lengths. If you want to have your LTE published in a specific newspaper, mimic the tones or styles found in that paper's past published LTEs.

### Step 3. Research the Guidelines and Requirements of your Chosen Newspaper

Determine what the guidelines are for the newspaper you have chosen to receive your LTE. If you can't find this information, call the publication to ask what the guidelines are.

### Step 4. Determine Your Reason for Writing the LTE

Determine exactly why you want to include in your letter. Also, take time to figure out what you hope to accomplish with your LTE's publication.

For example, are you happy about a commutation of a death penalty sentence? Are you angry that your state just executed an inmate believed to be innocent? Are you wanting to rally support for legislation aimed at repealing the death penalty?

Your answer to these questions will help you what tone you will take in your LTE.

### Step 5. Act Quickly!

Ensure that your LTE is fitting within the current events framework by submitting within 2-3 days of the original article's publication. Whether you are responding to an article detailing an execution or death penalty repeal legislation, ensure your voice is heard by remaining well-timed.

# How to Write an LTE (cont.)



---

## Packaging Your LTE

**1. Include your return address and contact information in case the editors want to contact you if your LTE is chosen.**

**2. After your contact information, include the date in this format: "Nov. 19th, 2019"**

**3. Write the recipient's name and address.** When sending the email or physical letter, address the letter with the information found in the newspaper, or you can just write, "Editor". Address the email or letter with the following information:

- Recipient's name
- Recipient's position
- Company
- Address

**4. In the email, let it be known if you prefer the letter published anonymously.** Attaching your name to your LTE is the preferred option, as some newspapers won't publish LTEs anonymously. This information is available in the paper's LTE guidelines.

**5. The salutation ought to be simple, such as, "To the editor," or "To the editor of the Herald," or finally, "Dear editor."**

## Writing Your LTE

**1. Make it easy for the readers to know to which article you are responding by referencing that article right away.**

**2. Make your position clear right after your reference the article's argument.**

**3. Constrict your attention to one main point.** In an LTE, space is limited. Focusing attention to one main point allows you to make your case in the space allotted. Insert your main point in the beginning of your LTE, right after you reference the article's argument.

**4. Support your claim with evidence and facts.** Providing a few key facts can greatly improve the chances your LTE will get published. Current events, data, statements and statistics are examples of the kind of facts and evidence desirable.

**5. Use personal examples when offering alternatives or advice.** Using personal stories, or stories known to many, help to make points relevant and readers can understand, in a personal manner, what you mean when you offer your differing or similar point. You can also, at this point, direct readers to actions you have taken in support of your message.

# How to Write an LTE (cont.)



**6. Don't be afraid to use names.** By mentioning specific names, you can greatly influence an entity, legislator, or governor. It is important to remember that many individuals read the newspaper and very likely will read the one to which you send your LTE.

**7. Have a simple closing phrase with your name and city.** With a simple phrase, citing one more time your position on the issue, and your name and city, your argument is the last thing the audience will read and there will be a name to an argument. This makes the LTE concise and also personal. If you are writing in a professional capacity, make reference to your expertise on the issue; it will afford your LTE the credibility it deserves.

For example: Dr. John Smith, Professor of Death Penalty Law; Boise, Idaho

## Editing Your LTE

**1. Be original in your work, while also keeping what you want to say short and obvious.**

Don't say what everyone else is saying and don't say too much; be original in thought.

**2. Keep your content respectful, understandable and professional;** it doesn't help an LTE's potential for publishing if it is riddled with insults, personal opinions, or high-level words that only industry professionals will understand. Avoid "I think" statements, jargon, abbreviations or acronyms. There might be someone who needs to hear your opinion but doesn't understand what you are describing when the bulk of the letter is acronyms.

**3. Proofread your work and make sure there aren't small mistakes that might reduce your credibility.** Look for grammar, spelling, formatting, and idea-flowing mistakes. It is a good idea here to have somebody else proofread your LTE.

## Final Steps

**1. Send the LTE.** If you typed the LTE, email it; if you wrote the LTE, mail it. The paper's guidelines will tell you which form of submission is preferred.

**2. Don't be caught off guard if your LTE is edited, as the newspaper has that right.**

However, don't worry about your message being edited; most edits are either for length purposes or because there might be a sentence which is a little grammatically unclear.

**3. Follow up!** It is important that you check in with the newspaper to whom you sent your LTE, or with the entity you referenced in your letter, to see if they were affected by the content. For example, if you directed it to a governor to halt executions, follow up with the governor's office to see if they have received or read your LTE.

# How to Write an LTE (cont.)



---

## LTE Examples within a Death Penalty Context

### Example 1: Fiscal Irresponsibility

The death penalty has become a cruel and unusual system of enacting vengeance, not justice. It costs exorbitantly more than life in prison without parole and thus, it takes away resources that are desperately needed. Our Governor wants economic prosperity but spends thousands of taxpayer dollars on execution drugs whose constitutionality are still debated in the courts. If the Governor truly intends to bring us economic prosperity, then the Governor should do the logical step and issue all of us a refund.

### Example 2: Political Appeal

Government should promote policies and programs which are just. The death penalty is an unjust system of teaching that killing is wrong, by killing even more! Problems persist in the government with managing health care, caring for the poor and even getting the streets plowed on time. So how could we, knowing that the death penalty is rife with its own problems, even begin to accept the problem-ridden government's acceptance of it? The state has shown that it is less than adequate in dealing with life matters. I totally oppose the the death penalty and am appalled to see elected officials supporting it.

### Example 3: International affiliation

The United States, along with China, Saudi Arabia, are among the top tiered countries in the world which use the death penalty. We desire to live in a just world but, sadly, we know there are some countries whose very policies directly act against the dignity of the human person. Capital punishment is one of those cases of violating the dignity of the human person. We are now categorized with countries that violate a long list of human rights. I think we are better than that.

### Example 4: Myth of Deterrence

The death penalty is an unjust system which some people cite as being a deterrent for crime. People say the death penalty serves as a deterrent for crime, but this just isn't true. Let's ask a state with perceivably unbridled executions, like Texas, how their crime rate is. If the death penalty were a deterrent, Texas would not put so many people to death, because there wouldn't be anybody to put to death. Frankly, the death penalty is not a deterrent. In fact, 88% of criminologists agree that the death penalty doesn't serve as any kind of deterrent.

# How to Write an LTE (cont.)



---

## Example 5: Tough on Crime

We all agree it is only just that a convicted offender serve punishment for what they have done to society. The death penalty, however, is for a number of reasons not the answer. Not only is the death penalty a cruel and unjust answer to injustice, but it also affects those correctional employees who have to administer the lethal injection drugs. Is that added trauma really worth it? How can that not have a lasting effect on those officers for the rest of their lives? Because we can resort to life without parole, and prevent victimizing more people, I am against the the death penalty.

## Example 6: Florida's System

The death penalty is a cruel and unjust display of fake justice, and our society knows it. In fact, in a decision made by the US Supreme Court, Florida's system for deciding death sentences was found unconstitutional. Following this, many legal experts have said other states' death penalty systems are "built on a bed of sand" and are at risk of a similar fate. Even people who support the death penalty are becoming increasingly convinced that the system is nothing more than a mess of expensive appeals that drag on for years, bringing about wrongful convictions and perpetuate the broken mechanisms. It's time to get rid of the death penalty.

## Example 7: Execution Protocols

The cruel and unjust usage of the death penalty is rife with errors, but particularly when it comes to the lethal injection protocol. Changes to this protocol have been proposed, however, these changes are unrealistic. Any attempts would be met with expensive and lengthy legal challenges. Even if the state managed to get the changes done, there's no guarantee the state would be able to obtain whatever new drugs they decide to use, as drug manufacturers increasingly refuse to supply these chemicals to states that carry out executions. Attempts by amateurs have resulted in the horror shows witnessed in Oklahoma, where the condemned took hours to die in obvious agony, subjecting them to needless suffering and causing emotional distress to onlookers. This death penalty system is cruel and unjust, it's time to get rid of it.

## Example 8: - Murder Victim Family Members

The death penalty is said to bring about justice for those whose loved ones were murdered. However attractive this seems, vengeance and revenge can never be the justification for a cruel and unjust system of punishment. What all of us need after a terrible crime has been committed is healing and to be made whole again. Killing others to teach that killing is wrong is counter-intuitive and flies in the face of what the essence of punishment, which is supposed to be rehabilitative and restorative, actually is.