Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Writing Tips

- **The point.** The first sentence should be a short summary of what’s at stake. One of the biggest mistakes in persuasive writing is using the first paragraph (or the entire letter or op-ed) to build to the point. Most editors read 2-3 sentences before making a decision to go on.

- **Word count.** Check the guidelines for the paper you are targeting. If they give a word count, follow it. If they don’t, 750 words is considered the maximum length for op-eds and 250 words is the limit for letters to the editor. Many papers will reject your submission if you do not adhere to the word limit. If the paper accepts your op-ed and edits it to meet their guidelines, you’ll have no control over what they cut.

- **Make it relevant and accessible.** We’ve provided sample language but it’s essential that you tailor your submission with local examples of impact. It’s also essential to avoid workforce jargon and acronyms.

Submitting

Many newspapers have specific format requirements, so please check the paper’s website before submitting. Always include full contact information for the author(s).

- **Follow the rules.** In general, if you have multiple papers in one media market, you cannot submit the same op-ed to more than one paper at a time. If a paper rejects it, submit it to another outlet. This applies to national outlets as well. If you are submitting to different markets throughout your state (but not within the same city), you can typically submit to all papers at once. In addition, you can send your letter or op-ed to a number of weekly papers at once, with a high likelihood that they will print it if you live in the paper’s coverage area. With that said, some papers will have it in their guidelines that you cannot submit anything that has been submitted to another paper.

- **Follow up.** Once you have submitted the letter or op-ed, give the paper time to run it. If you see or hear nothing a few days later, call to check on the status of your submission.

Sample Language

Attached is an example of a letter to the editor that you could customize. It could also be used as a starting point for an op-ed.

Especially when writing an op-ed, customizing this language to fit where you live, your members of Congress, and your local work/experience is critical to getting it run. Papers do not like “form” letters.
Sample Letter to the Editor

NOTE: Be sure to check that your final letter is no more than 250 words before submitting.

Dear Editor:

The economy is getting stronger. But we won’t be able to support this growth if we don’t make investments in job-driven skills training.

The U.S. has a skill gap in the middle—jobs that require education beyond a high school diploma but not a four-year degree. And the numbers bear this out.

These middle-skill jobs account for 54 percent of the U.S. labor market, but only 44 percent of U.S. workers are trained to the middle-skill level. As a result, key industries are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill jobs.

Why is this happening? Quite simply, education and training investments aren’t job-driven enough.

Our policymakers need to make addressing the skills gap a top priority. That’s why I recently traveled to our nation’s capital to meet with [name member of Congress or office you visited] to stress this very point.

There is good work being done by many to address the skills gap. But we need action at all levels of government to overcome it.

We can start by fully funding career and technical education, adult education, and workforce programs. We can modernize the Pell Grant so that more workers can gain access to the credentials that employers value. And we can’t leave behind the tens of millions of hardworking Americans whose limited reading and math skills prevent them from training for higher-paying jobs.

Targeting investments to close the middle-skill gap must be a greater national priority.

Name
Title/organization (optional)
Address
Phone Number
Email address

(Only your name and city/town will be published, but supplying the additional information helps papers verify the authenticity of letters.)