

Letters to the Editor Guidelines

Short, concise letters are always more likely to be published than long ones; for The New York Times and other national media, stay under 150 words. Be timely; try to respond within two or three days of the article's publication.

1. A letter to the editor should be organized as follows: First, a brief reference to the news story or current trend or development to which you are reacting. Next, a quick recitation of the argument you are opposing or correcting, followed by a statement of your own position. It is good to include an article title and date if you are responding to something specific. Then present your evidence. Close with a short restatement of your position or a pithy comment.
2. Stick to a single subject. Deal with one issue per letter.
3. Be kind. Editors tend to discard letters containing personal attacks on individuals.
4. Use facts, figures and expert testimony whenever possible to support your opinion.
5. Proofread carefully for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Newspapers will usually edit, but your piece is more likely to be published if it needs very little editing. When you think you are done, put the letter aside for while. Rereading your letter with fresh eyes often helps spot errors.
6. Try to view the letter from the reader's perspective. Will the arguments make sense to someone without a special background on this issue? Did you use technical terms not familiar to the average reader?
7. The letter should be typed, double spaced, and addressed to the Editor. Look at the standard format in the paper to which you are writing if you are unsure of structure.
8. Always include your name, address, day-time phone number and signature. The publication will not publish this information, but may use it to verify that you wrote the letter.

Example of a Letter to the Editor:

To the Editor:

The crisis of a shortage of nurses in the Suffolk Health Department can be reversed! ["On the East End, A Nursing Shortage is Felt Most Deeply," L.I. Section, 1/22/06] Schools of nursing on Long Island are booming with bright, capable students who will soon graduate and these schools will continue to prepare growing numbers of nursing students for the foreseeable future. The key is that recruitment and retention initiatives must be advanced – increase salaries to recruit these talented individuals and fill as many slots as available to reduce the heavy workloads that lead to attrition. The investment will actually save money by avoiding costly hospitalizations for untreated patients in the community. It is unconscionable in 2006 for so many Suffolk residents to go without the care they need and deserve.

Harriet R. Feldman

Harriet R. Feldman, PhD, RN, is a Bellmore resident and former public health nurse. She is dean of nursing at Pace University and editor of the book, "The Nursing Shortage: Strategies for Recruitment and Retention in Clinical Practice and Education," published in 2000 by Springer.

9. Don't be discouraged if your letter isn't published. The editor may have received more responses on that issue than can be handled. Keep writing