

Tips for Writing & Placing Letters to the Editor and Opinion Pieces

MEETING THE MOMENT 2026



The Most Important Tip: Write for the right reasons and keep at it

During this time of constitutional crisis, lawyers have relevant expertise to help the public and media understand the events unfolding around us. One way to speak out is by writing an opinion piece or Letters to the Editor (LTEs). An Opinion or guest commentary article is an opportunity to explore broad themes or examine a single issue in greater depth.

E. B. White famously wrote, “Democracy is a letter to the editor.” Writing a letter is a small but important way to publicly stand up for the rule of law and democracy – something we can all do, be successful at, and, with the proper perspective, even enjoy. And, you can do it on your schedule and on your terms.

It is helpful to have the right perspective about publication. No one gets every letter accepted. But letter writing is not solely about seeing your opinion in print, as rewarding as that can be, it is about speaking out and doing something. Planting a flag. Saying what you stand for.

Writing Your Article

1. Timeliness and relevance.

It’s important to remember that timeliness and relevance are the name of the game. Publications are most likely to publish topics that are in the news. Note that, since LTEs are typically in response to a published article or opinion piece, the response should be fast, (*preferably* within one or two days), so speed is critical.

Pro-tip: For LTEs, put the title of the article about which you are commenting and the date of its publication in the subject line of your submission email. They receive too many letters to go fishing for one on a particular topic.

2. Choosing your topic and format.

An Op-Ed is an opportunity to explore broad themes or examine a single issue in greater depth. A Letter to the Editor is generally shorter and more specific. Op-Eds are approximately 650-800 words, compared to LTEs, which are 150-250 words.

Write LTEs in response to recent news articles or opinion pieces that raise

constitutional, rule-of-law, or justice system concerns about which you care deeply. Consider raising factual or legal errors, false assumptions, or rebuttable claims that the article leaves unchallenged. Sometimes your letter may be prompted by an editorial or opinion writer's treatment of the topic. Your letter doesn't have to be negative; you can praise strong reporting or opinion writing and use it to highlight the importance of the media or show how the piece connects to a larger truth. In all events, be targeted and be brief to better engage the reader and to respect the fact that opinion page space is at a premium.

Opinion articles are more extended essays written to shape public understanding of a topic, propose policy, or set the record straight. For our purposes, it could, for example, illuminate or document an unconstitutional pattern of conduct, explain how policies undermine the rule of law, or analyze court opinions or legislation that affect our democracy and rights. It should draw upon and reflect your expertise and experience, and should rely upon verifiable facts, sources, and supported opinions. These articles carry greater expectations and are tougher to place than LTEs.

3. Play by the rules.

Consult the publication's rules for submissions before drafting. You can usually find them on their website or by searching the web for "Does X publication have guidelines for Opinion articles and Letters to the Editor?" They are not uniform; some, for example ask that you submit via their form, and others accept emailed submissions. Virtually all publications have a word count. It's essential to know these requirements at the outset to help you focus your message within their limits.

4. Draw from LDAD messaging.

It's important to remember that timeliness and relevance are the name of the game, especially with the pace at which attacks on our democracy and rule of law are occurring. LDAD continues to provide you with messaging that helps you address these issues in a variety of ways such as Meeting the Moment *Insights*, LDAD's regular emailing, Talking Points to adapt and incorporate into your writing, and other tools available on its website to connect events unfolding in the news to broader themes and threats that LDAD is monitoring and addressing.

The more consistent we are in the language we use, and the points we make, the more likely our messages will be absorbed by wider audiences. It will take a lot of voices saying similar things to break through all the disinformation and polarization plaguing our society and truly make a difference in defending our democracy.

5. Always have a point of view and, when you can, note a personal connection.

In opinion articles, especially, but sometimes in LTEs, you may choose to briefly describe your connection to the subject matter. Briefly providing personal context demonstrates your standing, giving your message the credibility it deserves, (e.g. “As a former investigator at the EPA...”).

Having a clear point of view is essential. Both opinion articles and LTEs run in the opinion section, so give them yours; editors choosing what to publish are looking for distinct perspectives. Answer the question “What’s your point?” Having a point of view - and arguing it - is critical to getting published.

6. Open with a strong statement and close with a memorable one.

When you write your letter, remember that you are writing for an audience of one – the opinion page editor. So, dive right in to catch and hold that person’s attention. Jettison unnecessary introductions like “I’m writing to respond to the article...” Some first sentences throw down the gauntlet, while others lay the predicate for the argument to come.

Irony and humor can go a long way in getting an editor (and the public) to notice your piece. Some writers utilize irony or humor in their last sentence to contrast or gently mock the position they are attacking. Others drive home a larger point by appealing to a higher principle or by posing a rhetorical question. This is not math, it’s art, so there are no formulas, and a well-reasoned letter on a timely topic can get published in a myriad of styles. The letters-to-the-editor sections of newspapers are replete with examples of the varied approaches. Spend some time there. The purpose here is just to highlight approaches that have worked. There are a few sample openings and closings at the end of this document.

7. Be focused, brief, and accurate.

Do not crowd your writing with too many points. Avoid unverifiable factual claims. For actual but lesser-known facts, include a link or reference that allows editors to quickly verify them. Sarcasm, snark, and funny nicknames for public figures work with our friends and on late-night shows, but not in print. Adopt the tone that the publication uses in its editorials.

Pitching Your Article

1. Research publications, local and national.

Do this at the beginning of the process (see #3 above). Which local or national news outlets are you interested in approaching? Who are their readers? What kinds of Opinion articles do they tend to publish? Do you know anyone there (it's always easier to get people to pay attention if you have a contact there)?

Pro-tip: Don't overlook local papers! Local papers are an important way to reach people in our communities and where opinion pieces are generally easier to place. Local papers are especially appropriate when democratic transgressions have been committed by state or local authorities or when you can show how unconstitutional or undemocratic national policies produce concrete, everyday harms in your community or communities like yours.

2. Submitting your article.

If the news outlet has a form for submissions, then you should use that and follow the instructions closely. Even if you know someone at the publication, it is a good idea to first submit your piece through the formal procedures before sending it to your contact (be sure to tell your contact that you have already submitted it). If the news outlet lists an email address for submissions, then you also need to draft a subject line and a pitch. The subject line should be clear that it is an opinion submission. The pitch should be something brief explaining why you are writing this now. Then you can both attach a word version as well as paste your submission below your signature.

Pro-tip: Some editors do not want to open attachments because of the risk of viruses, so always paste the text of your piece into the body of the email.

3. Your signature line.

Be sure to briefly include your credentials; note that you are an attorney, and your current or most recent relevant position. Have a one-to-two-line biography ready as most outlets will ask for that as part of the submission.

Please also identify your connection to LDAD, by using this wording: "XX is a volunteer with Lawyers Defending American Democracy." You can include a reference to your role as a State Lead or to your state's MTM group as relevant and if space allows (i.e. "XX volunteers [as a State Lead] with Lawyers Defending American Democracy's Meeting the Moment initiative in [your state's name]").

4. One submission at a time to one paper at a time.

Only submit your article to one publication at a time. Most publications will require you to confirm that your submission has not been submitted elsewhere. Also, only have one article in a paper's queue at a time.

Pro-tip: Be aware that if your article is accepted, the paper may not want to publish an article from you for the next few months, so choose wisely!

5. Following up, edits and withdrawals

Most publications will state in their submission guidelines that if you do not hear from them within a certain number days, you may shop your piece elsewhere. If it is accepted, they will send you any proposed edits and ask whether you accept them. Unless the edits change the meaning, introduce inaccuracies, or undermine your purpose in writing, say yes. It's their paper.

With LTEs, papers generally will not contact you if they decide not to publish your letter and there is no need for follow-up. For an opinion piece, however, if you haven't heard anything from the publication in several days, you can politely reach out to ask about the status of your submission. Use the email you used to submit your article or contact the editor of the editorial page as a respectful follow-up. You can normally find that name on the masthead or the "contact us" section.

If your opinion piece is particularly time-sensitive, advise the publication that you are withdrawing your submission, and thank them for considering your work. Then you can tailor it for submission somewhere else or repurpose it for social media.

Remember the most important tip: be persistent and keep writing! Don't be discouraged by rejection.

The act of writing and submitting your letter is a virtue unto itself and doesn't depend on publication. You don't stop voting because your candidate lost. Keep writing. You will break through. An unpublished letter has value. Editors are influenced by the number of letters they get on a subject – your letter, even if not selected, may help another letter on the subject get published. Publication is not just about technique. It's about probabilities. Keep putting your hook in the water while maintaining your standards. The opinion page editor will notice.

Remember that an unpublished letter can be reworked and resubmitted to another publication or the same one when the issue surfaces again. It can also be reformatted and posted on social media ("For those that saw that article in the New York Times yesterday [link] about administrative warrants - here is how I look at it.")

or sent to family and friends. It's also a good way to organize your thoughts for that next conversation or, simply, to blow off steam. Save your unpublished letters – they could form the basis for a future op-ed.

Illustrative Examples for Inspiration

A positive opening	I found Mr. Lozada’s article to be the one that says it all. It took my breath away as I read his concise explanation of who we are as Americans.
An opening that incorporates personal expertise	As a retired New York State Supreme Court justice, I understood my role and that of my colleagues as fair adjudicators of disputes according to law and fact, not ideology or political loyalty.
A one-sentence letter spotlighting irony	It is beyond irony that the new mission of the Environmental Protection Agency to reverse all policies designed to protect the environment is chillingly reminiscent of the role of Guy Montag, the fireman in Ray Bradbury’s dystopian novel “Fahrenheit 451”: burning books banned by the administration.
Use of humor in the opening sentence, use of hyperlink, and brevity	I request that President Trump, in addition to <u>erasing the scientific finding that climate change endangers the environment</u> , erase the laws of gravity. They interfere with my freedom of movement. Thank you for your attention to this matter.
A closing with a dramatic ending	You might say “That’s not me,” but enough people did not care enough to challenge the ugliness that he now represents all of us. I fear for us, our country and the world.
A closing using a rhetorical question	Is this really the culture of terror in which Republicans want to have their children form their memories?
A closing, pointing out irony	Despite its rhetoric to the contrary, how can one not conclude that this administration is intent on building, not dismantling, the “deep state”?
A closing appealing to a higher authority	The Constitution does not allow delay. It requires action — now.

Note: This document was prepared to enable LDAD’s Meeting the Moment volunteers to speak out in defense of American democracy. It is based on insights from LDAD’s staff and organizational experience, as well as— very heavily, and with gratitude— the insights provided by Michael Curry, MTM co-State Lead for Texas, in the LDAD’s first MTM Skill Session: Writing Letters to the Editor (January 2026).