

LTE Writing



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by Sara Kiesler, Communications and Marketing Director at Cascade Bicycle Club

Acknowledgements

- Information gathered from Netroots Nation, Wellstone Action (formerly NOI), Knowhow Nonprofit, and more was used to build this training



About Me



- Former journalist (5 years)
- Nonprofit + Campaign Communications (12 years)
- Drafted and helped published dozens of LTEs for activists in Alaska, Idaho, and Washington
- Published Op-Eds in the Tacoma News Tribune, Seattle Times, Real Change, and Everett Herald, and ghostwritten op-eds in numerous other newspapers

What is a Letter to the Editor?



Tied to the current news and tells a personal story



Short opinion piece (150-200 words) published in the local paper's opinion section



States a problem, personalizes it, offers a solution, and summarizes the problem and solution



Why write and send an LTE?

- Your story can send a powerful message to decision makers and local leaders
- Even when people do not agree with your stance on an issue, they can connect on your values.
- Policy is the manifestation of our values

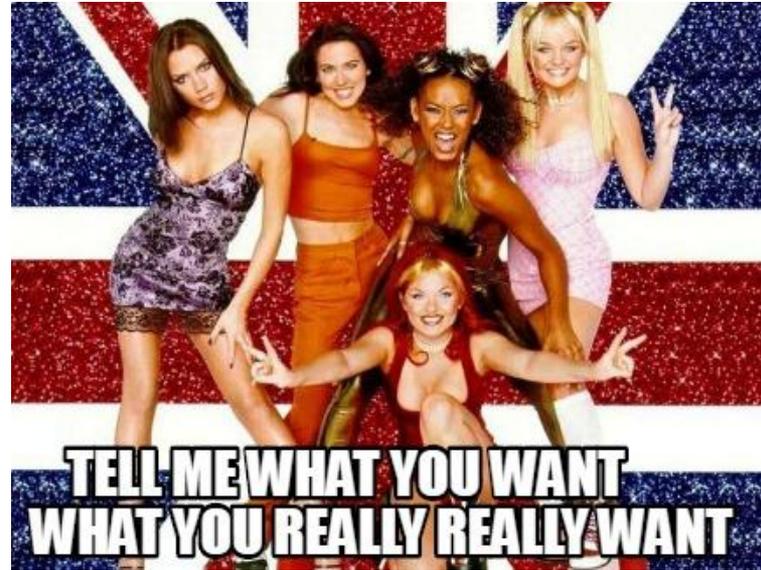
**“I’VE LEARNED THAT
PEOPLE WILL FORGET
WHAT YOU SAID,
PEOPLE WILL FORGET
WHAT YOU DID,
BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER
FORGET HOW YOU
MADE THEM FEEL.”**

Maya Angelou



So you want to write an LTE

- Consider your audience.
- Decide on your topic and angle.
- Be original.
- Organize your thoughts.



Anatomy of a good LTE

A good letter must cover a lot of ground in 150 or 200 words. You need a strong hook.



- Engaging hook / personal story
- State the problem
- Compelling ask/resolution
- Restate your position



That looks like..

Email Subject: Letter to the Editor – {Compelling Subject}

Dear Editor,

{Engaging Hook} {State the Problem}

{Additional info and context}

STRONG ASK

{Restate Your Position}

Thanks,

Signer, City of Residence

A published LTE we drafted for an advocate

Editor,

It was disappointing to read the May 14 story about the non-existent “battle for road supremacy” between people riding bikes and driving cars. This article perpetuates a dangerous us-versus-them mentality.

Like most people who bike, I also own and drive a car. When I am driving my truck I am certainly not vying for supremacy. More importantly, when I'm biking or walking, I don't want car drivers to see me as an enemy combatant. Please refrain from using words of war to describe America's horrible lack of road safety.

I have commuted by bike for many years, most recently from Bellevue to Seattle. Inattentive drivers and a lack of safety infrastructure are the most dangerous part of my commute, not some perceived lack of rule following on my part.

Too many people in our region are killed when walking or biking. Just look at the past month in Seattle, where both Michael Colmant and Robert Miesse were hit and killed by drivers. I encourage you to instead tell stories of substance about the real solutions that could lead to better safety for people driving, bicycling, and walking.



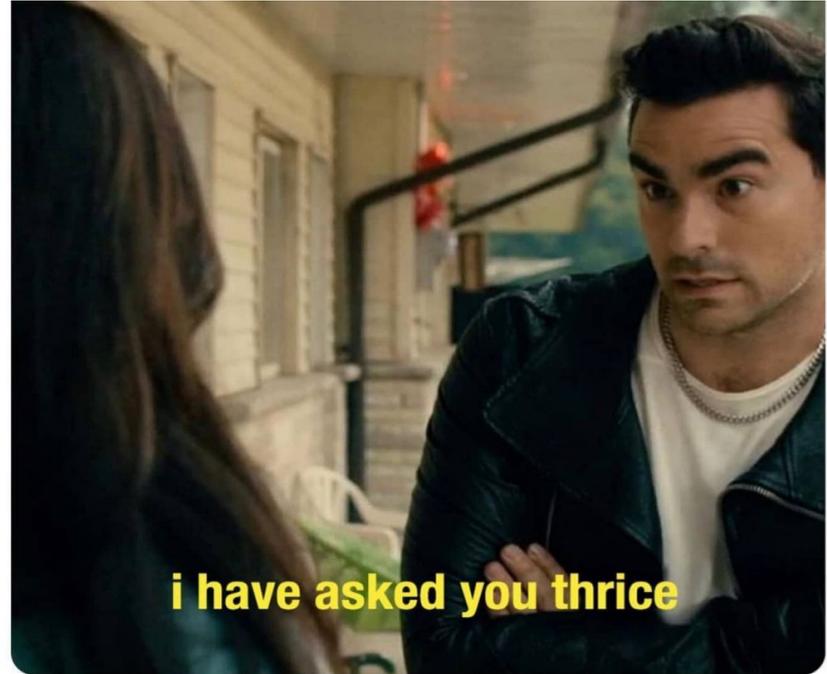
Letter Writing Tips

- Focus on a single issue
- Keep it under 150 words if possible
- Don't use jargon or acronyms
- Try and write in AP Style
- Respond to recent events and articles
- TELL A STORY and include a CALL TO ACTION



A Call to Action Is:

- Direct
- Specific
- Measureable



What's the call to action here?

Here's why Letter to the editor author Erik Bjornson is wrong when he says there is no evidence that lowering the legal blood-alcohol limit to .05 would save lives.

A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study from 2022 showed that traffic fatalities decreased in Utah after that state lowered its BAC to .05. The National Academy of Sciences, the National Safety Council, the National Transportation Safety Board, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and many other traffic safety organizations have reached the same conclusion: .05 saves lives.

Opponents say this will lead to more DUI stops. Not true. Senate Bill 5002 is aimed at behavior change. Studies show that awareness of Utah's new .05 law caused more drinkers to arrange designated drivers, rideshares or sober rides home.

“The goal of this bill is not to increase the number of DUI arrests but to remind and encourage people to avoid driving after drinking and thereby save lives,” said Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste in a Washington Traffic Safety Commission press release.

Last year was the deadliest on Washington state roads since 1990. We are facing a public health crisis of traffic deaths. Impaired drivers cause more than half of all fatal crashes. It's time to act. Tell your legislators to vote Yes on SB 5002.

Connie Ladenburg, Tacoma



Restate your position

- Consider the emotional arc of your letter as you restate your position – how do you want the reader to feel?
- Beginning: “Everyone deserves a safe place to walk and ride a bike. But here in Tacoma, I can’t even walk at a flashing stop light without being nearly run over.”
- End: “By passing the Vulnerable Road User Law, leaders can protect people biking and walking from being hit or killed on our streets. No one deserves to die because of a careless driver.”

The Strongest Arcs

- **Anger/outrage** □ **Accomplished/Vindicated**
- **Fear/Concern** □ **Safe, Restored**
- **Sadness, Empathy** □ **Compassion, Solidarity**
- **Shock, Disgust** □ **Energized, In Control**



Submitting your LTE

- Look up the form or email required to submit
- Make sure your Word Count is correct
- Include your address and phone number in the submission letter.
- Submit! (**But DO NOT submit to multiple papers**)



Takeaways

- An LTE responds to current news or a recent article
- It includes a personal story, a problem, and a solution
- It includes one issue
- It has a direct call to action
- It restates the author's position and considers the emotional journey
- It is 150-200 words and does not use jargon or acronyms
- It is submitted to one paper with the correct word count
- The author includes their address and phone number



Any questions?

