

The New York Times

Student Contest | Write a Letter to the Editor, for Publication in the Opinion Section

Contest Rules

The Letters desk, responsible for publishing all letters to the editor, wants **high school students** to submit a letter in response to a news article, editorial, column or Op-Ed essay in The Times **published in the past few days**. The letters editors will select and edit the best entries and publish them online on Friday, May 29, with a smaller selection in print on Sunday, May 31.

What else do you need to know?

Letters should be about **150 to 200 words** and must include the headline of the article and a link to it.

Be sure to include your name, age, high school and grade, and city or town and state (for publication) and telephone number (for verification, not for publication).

Email your submission to **letters@nytimes.com**. Please put “Student Competition” in the subject line.

The deadline is May 21, 2015.

Tips on How to Write a Compelling Letter

We asked Thomas Feyer, the letters editor at The Times, to offer advice to students for how to get a letter published in The Times. Here are his recommendations:

What is a letter to the editor? It’s the reader’s chance to make his or her voice heard — to address the news of the day, usually in response to an article in the newspaper.

I’ve been letters editor of The New York Times for more than 15 years now, and an editor at The Times for more than 34 — mostly on the foreign desk before I moved to the opinion side of the paper. As letters editor, I’m privileged to spend every day doing something quite exciting — learning what’s on your mind.

The Times welcomes feedback from readers, and recognizes the importance of the free flow of ideas and information to the vital functioning of our democracy.

We have a loyal following of readers — including some harsh critics — who are not shy about expressing their opinions and who want to be heard in this forum. They want to talk back to us, and to the nation’s and the world’s leaders — “to speak truth to power” (as the expression goes) — and to read what fellow readers have to say.

We are, of necessity, quite selective in choosing letters. We receive hundreds of letters a day, and sometimes even 1,000 or more when the news is particularly intense. But space is extremely limited in the print version (usually 8 to 10 letters a day), though we do add letters online.

We edit all letters for clarity; we follow the rules of grammar and usage; we check facts for accuracy; we trim for space. And we try to present a reasonable sampling of opinion in a tight, readable package.

I would never presume to tell you what your opinion should be, of course — but I will offer advice about how to make your letter the most likely to attract my attention, and, perhaps, publication.

Here are some basic, practical tips:

Refer to an article in the paper. This goes without saying if you're responding to a column, an editorial or an Op-Ed article. But it applies to news articles as well. You'd be amazed to see how referring to an article in the paper focuses your attention. It really helps you to respond directly and to the point.

Speaking of which . . .

Write briefly and to the point. Generally letters are about 150 to 175 words. It's a good target to aim for. A rambling letter of 1,000 words is less likely to attract my attention than a pithy, well-argued letter of 150 words. We're aiming to get as many voices on the page as possible. We can go a little longer for web-only letters.

Write clearly. Keep it civil in tone. No profanity (of course). NO SHOUTING. No gratuitous insults. Eloquence and elegance are key. Be engaging; try to charm me. Wit and humor, and a well-turned phrase, are always welcome, but irony and sarcasm often don't translate well on the printed page. Argument and disagreement are fine — welcome, in fact — but confine your discussion to the substance of the argument, instead of attacking the writer.

Be prepared to back up your facts with evidence. We check all the facts in a letter, or ask you to provide backup, usually with links or citations.

In addition to the big topics, **write about something off the beaten path.** If you write a letter agreeing or disagreeing with a particularly provocative editorial, column or Op-Ed article — and, by all means, come ahead — you join the crowd. If I run five or six letters about an article, I also have to reject dozens of other letters about the same article, although they may be perfectly worthy.

If, however, you send in a well-written letter about a smaller article in The Times, you may be the only one. So your chances of getting published go way up!

Your letter should be exclusive to The Times, and not previously published in any medium.

Finally, when sending your letter, **please give full contact information**, including daytime and evening phone numbers, and address (for our internal use, not for publication), as well as your current location (city or town, and state) for dateline purposes. If your letter is selected, we will contact you, and play back an edited version for your approval before publication.

The important thing is: Speak your mind, practice your writing . . . and have fun. Good luck!