How to Write LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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What is a Letter-to-the-Editor?

a. A short communication on any subject of interest to the journal reader, published at the Editor’s discretion

b. \( \leq 600 \text{ words (250 words DS/page)} \), \( \leq 5 \) references, 0 or \( \leq 2 \) figures/tables, & \( \leq 5 \) authors

c. Must have a purpose, be short and concise, with a clear message that merits publication
Purposes of a Letter

- **Objective and constructive comments** on previously published articles
  a. Provide **additional information or evidence** (other research studies)
  b. Raise points **not adequately covered** in the article
  c. Identify **errors** and making a **correction**
  d. Approaching subject matter from a **different perspective**
  e. Provide a **counterpoint**
  f. Provide an **alternate theory**

- **Case report**
- **Case series** or reporting an **adverse drug reaction**
International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) recommends publishing letters in journals together with their answers

a. Select medical topic that you enjoy and or specialize in
b. Select a journal that publishes “Letter-to-the-Editor”

c. Most journals only accept letters discussing their journal articles

d. Respond within 1-2 months of publication → the sooner, the better, 1 MONTH IS BETTER

e. Some journals have online “rapid response” or electronic letter section
Common Writing Strengths

a. A short title (use PubMed key words)
b. Use **brief and concise** wording (avoid cutesy)
c. Make **specific** comments
d. Base comments on **scientific evidence**, not biased opinions
e. Authors’ **names**, **email addresses**, and **institutional affiliations** at end of letter

[PubMed.gov logo]
Common Writing Problems

a. Avoid repetition of points covered in original article
b. Too much description / detail
c. Unprofessional comments on integrity, competence, or sincerity of authors
   a. Stay “professional” - must be courteous
   b. Do not assume a rude, pejorative attitude (disapproval / contempt)
   c. Authors of original articles will be invited to respond to your criticisms
Before Letter Submission

a. Most journals require **cover letter**:
   a. Introduce your **intentions**,
   b. Declare any **conflicts of interest**,
   c. Statement that **letter is original** and has not been submitted/published elsewhere

b. Submit **copyright** assignment from each author

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After Letter Submission

a. **Review** - Editor may decide or it may go out to reviewer and original author

b. **Rejection** – It happens. Submit another letter! Resilient, learn, stronger…

a. **Acceptance** – respond asap

   Meaning a 24-48 hour turnaround

   i. a **proof** of your letter will be sent to you

   ii. check for errors & answer questions
Questions?

Thank you!

Contact AmyBrown@Hawaii.edu