



From: Nellie Bly and Investigative Journalism for Kids
Published by Chicago Review Press, 2015

Write a Letter to an Editor

In 1885, when Nellie Bly read Erasmus Wilson's columns in the Pittsburgh Dispatch, she felt angry. But she didn't just fume; she did something about it. Nellie wrote a letter to George Madden, the editor of the Pittsburgh Dispatch. She told him exactly what she thought about Wilson's words. This letter changed Nellie's life. Madden was impressed with Nellie's thoughts and the passion behind her words. The editor eventually hired Nellie as a reporter, which turned her life around and launched her writing career. In this activity you'll write a letter to an editor about something you feel strongly about.

Approximate age range: fifth to eighth grade

Objective: To help young people learn how to express thoughts through writing, and to learn how to contact a newspaper editor.

You'll Need:

- * Pencil or pen
- * Paper
- * Envelope & stamp
- * Computer with Internet access

1. Find a newspaper and go to the "Letters to the Editor" section. You'll find guidelines as to how to write your letter in terms of word count, how to submit your piece (by email or mail), and how to provide contact information.
2. Read examples of published Letters to the Editor.
3. Choose a topic to write about. Are you unhappy about something in your community or world? Would you like to respond to an article you read? Is there something positive you'd like to share?
4. Write your letter. Letters are usually one to three paragraphs and not more than about 200 words. Remember to back up your opinions and feelings with examples.
5. Proofread your letter and correct mistakes. It's often a good idea to have someone else look at your letter to check for spelling errors.
6. Once your letter is written, sign it. Remember to include your contact information.

7. Now it's time to send in your letter. Send your letter to only one publication at a time. Editors receive thousands of letters and publish only a fraction of the letters that arrive on their desk. Writers are typically contacted only if their letters will be published.

8. If your letter is published, cut it out and save it as a writing sample called a "clip."



Newsies sold newspapers in the early 1900s.

Photo by Lewis Hine, Courtesy Library of Congress