



A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO
GIVE KIDS the **SCHOOL FOOD THEY DESERVE**

A SLOW FOOD USA CAMPAIGN

Writing a Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor is a letter written to a newspaper by a reader in order to respond to an article or offer an opinion. Usually, the letter is 150 words or less.

What does it do?

A good letter to the editor captures people's attention, and gives them new insight and an opportunity to act. It can also be a way to get your legislator's attention – legislative staff usually read the news in order to keep track of voters' interests. In general, a letter to the editor raises the profile of an issue.

When should I write one?

Letters to the editor usually respond to a previous article in the paper. Your letter can commend the article, offer an alternative perspective, or highlight something that wasn't mentioned. Keep an eye out for articles about school food, childhood obesity, children's health, local farmers or related issues.

If there isn't a related story, tie your letter to something newsworthy happening in your community: an event, a new initiative, a recent incident, an upcoming holiday, etc.

Which newspaper(s) should I write to?

Local and small-circulation papers usually print most of the letters they receive. It's much harder to get published in a national paper, unless your letter is super-compelling and tied to current national news.

Also consider submitting letters to weekly community newspapers and newspapers that serve a particular audience (parents, a denomination, an ethnic group).

How do I write a good letter?

- Identify your target paper, and consider its audience. If your letter will interest the paper's typical readers, the editor will print it.

- Consult the newspaper's guidelines for submitting a letter. They're usually on the paper's web site, but you can also call the editorial desk.
- Get your primary message across at the very beginning, and then spend the rest of the letter painting a clear picture of the problem and backing up your point.
- Use stories, not statistics. Our brains remember anecdotal details better than numbers – particularly when those details remind us of ourselves or place us in a narrative. Statistics can be useful, but use them sparingly.
- Make it locally relevant. Many newspapers receive plenty of national stories from news syndicates, and are eager to print local news that local residents want to read.
- Finish your letter with a call to action and an opportunity to get involved.
- Your own letter will be more effective if it's written from the heart. Don't copy and paste from a sample letter – instead, explain *why you* care.

What are the key messages for the Time for Lunch Campaign?

- Teachers and school meal providers work hard to create a healthy food environment, but the odds are stacked against them. They're fighting a broken system.
- Right now, the most important thing we can do to improve school lunch is encourage Congress to pass a strong Child Nutrition Act.
- At www.slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch, you can ask [your legislator] to invest in healthier food, strengthen nutrition standards, and link schools to local farms.

How do I submit my letter?

The guidelines vary, so check the newspaper's web site. Always include your phone number with your letter, in case the editor needs to reach you with questions. If you're sending your letter by fax or mail, make sure to sign it at the bottom.

If you have questions or would like help editing your letter, contact Slow Food USA staff member Gordon Jenkins at gordon@slowfoodusa.org.