

## How to write a letter to the editor

A letter to the editor of a newspaper is a formal letter in which the reader comments on an article which has recently appeared in this newspaper.

Simply begin your letter with "Sir," (or "Madam," if you are sure that the editor is a woman). Do not use "Dear ..." like in other formal letters!

Start the first sentence with a capital letter. At the beginning, state which article you are referring to. These phrases may help you:

- *With reference to your article of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010, "(title/headline)", I would like to ...*
- *In his/her article of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010, "(title/headline)", XY said that ...*
- *With interest, I read XY's article of ...*
- *I am referring to ...*

Keep in mind that you are writing to the editor, not to the author of the text!

Finish with a concluding paragraph in which you do one of the following:

- (re)state your opinion,
- summarize your findings,
- outline possible consequences

End with just your name and place of residence. Do not use "Yours sincerely/faithfully" like in other formal letters!

21<sup>st</sup> February 2011

Re: The impact of plastic bags

Sir,

In his article of 20<sup>th</sup> February 2011, "Plastic fantastic! Carrier bags not eco-villains after all", Martin Hickman said that plastic carriers are less damaging to the environment than paper or cotton alternatives.

Please allow me to voice my criticism of this article. Unfortunately the author only concentrates on the CO<sub>2</sub> that is emitted in the production, transportation and disposal of the different kinds of bags while other environmental problems are only mentioned briefly.

Firstly plastic bags are made of oil. You might have heard that oil needs 300 million years to form and is a limited resource which should not be wasted on the production of plastic bags that are only used for a few minutes.

Secondly it takes 400-1,000 years for plastic to degrade and since plastic bags are so light, the wind often carries them away from garbage dumps and into the sea. There the plastic is a threat for animals that try to eat it or are caught in it and die.

To my mind the politicians should ban plastic bags all over the European Union. As a result people would be forced to bring baskets or cotton bags when they go shopping, which even Hickman calls the best option.

Judith Homer, Borhamwood

In the reference line, you should state briefly what your letter is about, beginning with the abbreviation "Re:" ("referring to").

Keep in mind that a letter to the editor is meant to be printed. So make it short and to the point. Start a new paragraph for each idea. Make sure that you use formal language, e.g. use "I am" instead of "I'm".

Express your opinion clearly but politely, especially when expressing criticism. Here are some useful phrases:

- *After carefully studying your article, I am sorry to say that ...*
- *Please allow me to voice my criticism of ...*
- *In fact, I would like express doubts about ...*
- *Unfortunately, you forgot to mention that ...*
- *An option you have possibly not seriously considered is ...*
- *I would appreciate more objectivity when ...*
- *I was hoping for a more impartial treatment of this subject.*

Use connectives to structure your text. You can find many useful expressions on the handout "Connectives for argumentative texts".

Sources: Password to Skyline plus. Workbook. Klett. / Sicher ins Zentralabitur. Nordrhein-Westfalen. Klett.