

# Reading and Writing a Letter to the Editor

## LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Graphic Organizer, Marking the Text, Sharing and Responding

## My Notes

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

This list of tips is composed primarily of statements. However, a number of these bulleted items are questions. What is the effect of these questions? Why might the author have chosen to use questions rather than statements in these instances?

## Learning Targets

- Create an editorial letter according to specific criteria.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of multiple editorial letters based on criteria.

## Before Reading

1. **Quickwrite:** Skim over an assortment of letters to the editor. What do they have in common? What advice would you offer a friend who is about to write a letter to the editor? Be prepared to share your advice with the class.
2. Next, read through the informational text “How to Write a Letter to the Editor.” You will be using the following tips as you craft your own letter to the editor.

## How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters that are intended for publication should be drafted carefully. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Make one point (or at most two) in your letter. Be sure to identify the topic of your letter. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
- Make your letter timely. If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial, or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
- Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper to which you are writing. Refute or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, offer a completely different perspective on the issue, but avoid blanket attacks on the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- Consider your audience (the newspaper’s editors and readers):
  - What does your audience currently believe about the issue? Why?
  - How will they respond to you? Why?
  - What can you do to persuade them to change their minds?
  - How will using slanted language affect your credibility and persuasiveness?
- Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. (Generally, roughly two short paragraphs are ideal.) You also must include your name, signature, address, and phone number.
- Look at the letters that appear in your paper. Is a certain type of letter usually printed?
- Support your facts. If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter. But don’t overload the editors with too much information.
- Keep your letter brief. Type and spell check it. Have a peer edit it.
- When possible, find others in the community to write letters to show concern about the issue. If your letter doesn’t get published, perhaps someone else’s on the same topic will.
- If your letter has not appeared within a week or two, follow up with a call to the newspaper’s editorial department.

### During Reading

3. Your teacher will provide an editorial and several letters written in response to the editorial. Fill in the chart below for each of the letters to the editor. The last box is for your opinion on the editorial.

Letter Number	Agree or Disagree with Original Editorial?	Reasons
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

4. **Quickwrite:** Which of the letters to the editor made the strongest argument? What made that argument compelling?

# Reading and Writing a Letter to the Editor

## My Notes

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

The author makes use of a variety of rhetorical techniques—among them, the use of alliteration (“Wiis, Wikis, and Wi-fi”) and lists of three (used, interestingly enough, three times in this first paragraph). What is the effect of these techniques?

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

How does the author convey her attitude toward cell phones?

5. As you read the following editorial about cell phones, mark the text to identify words or phrases that reveal the writer’s tone and its effect on the reader.

## Editorial

# Why I Hate Cell Phones

by Sara Reihani

**1** In this wild, unpredictable world that modern society has thrust upon us, only one gadget anchors us amid the whirl of Wiis, Wikis and Wi-fi: the cellular phone. From its origins as the pineapple-sized “car phone” exclusive to power-suited 80’s business executives to its current incarnation as camera/computer/life coach, the cell phone has gone from convenient utility to graven idol of instant gratification. Scores of modern social phenomena are directly attributable to cell phones including textual flirtation, Bluetooth use disguised as schizophrenia and the ringtone as a profound expression of personal identity.

**2** While constantly reachable has undeniable advantages, cell phones deceive us into thinking that this accessibility is an inalienable right rather than a flawed privilege. By giving people my cell phone number, I give them permission to contact me whenever they want, no matter where I am or what I am doing. I am thus shackled to their whim, subjecting me to their contact when it may not be desired. I could, of course, simply turn off my phone, but this is no longer an acceptable excuse. After all, what is the use of owning a cell phone if you are going to leave it off all the time?

**3** Those who live lives more unpredictable than mine may have good reason to consider their cell phones crucial lifelines, but for most of us, they are more of a luxury than a necessity. Cell phones are currently dirt cheap to manufacture, but their true cost is insidious and pervasive. Besides the perils of hidden fees and the lubricious allure of text-messaging, one must consider the emotional enslavement that comes with allowing the outside world to contact you almost anywhere. Owning a cell phone guarantees that you can and will be interrupted in movie theaters, libraries or scenes of pastoral tranquility, usually for trivial reasons. In a world full of landlines, pay phones, email, instant messages and Facebook messages, few of us need the accessibility to go that extra mile.

**4** The most alluring thing about cell phones for the younger generation (i.e. us) is their efficacy as instruments of spontaneity. They ensure that no matter where you are or what you are doing, you can be notified of other entertainment opportunities; namely, where the new party is at. In this way, we are freed from the responsibility of making plans in advance. We can also cancel plans at the last minute without condemning ourselves to evenings of loneliness—instead, we can just use the opportunity to insinuate ourselves upon everyone else in our electronic phone books. This protean convenience breeds selfishness by liberating us from any solid idea of obligation. The primal human fear of isolation also comes into play here; cell phones feed on this anxiety like blood-hungry mosquitoes, promising a solution for the many who live in vague terror of spending time alone with their thoughts.

## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Roots and Affixes

The word *protean* is an adjective meaning changeable, versatile, or taking on varied shapes.

The word comes from the Greek god Proteus, who could change his form.

