



Letters to the editor

Student edition



Purpose for reading: To form opinions and write persuasively

PAGE 1

Introduction: This activity is going to help you form an opinion on a topic, explain the reasons for your point of view and write a letter to the editor about your opinion. You will learn to:

- ▶ Evaluate a current national or international issue.
- ▶ Develop arguments and support your ideas.
- ▶ Write a persuasive letter.

1. **In pairs**, read the two letters to the editor about peer pressure and good drivers.
2. What do the two letters have in common? What kind of language do they use? What tone of voice do they have?
3. Discuss your findings with your classmates.
4. **With your partner**, spend about 10-15 minutes skimming through the paper.
5. Look for articles that get your attention. Choose stories about topics that make you sad, angry, frustrated or happy.
6. Select one article that provokes a strong response in you.
7. Use the graphic organizer on Page 3 to analyze the article and summarize how you feel about what you read.



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- 8. **On your own**, use the graphic organizer on Page 4 to plan and write your own letter to the editor about the issue described in your article.

- 9. Remember these tips for writing a letter to the editor:
 - Keep it short, about 250 words.
 - Open with a strong statement.
 - Put the most important information first.
 - Include the headline of the article and the date it ran.

- 10. Share your letter **with a different partner**. Read your classmate's letter and answer these questions:
 - Did your classmate include the headline of the article and the date the article was published?

 - What issue is the letter about?

 - What position did your classmate take?

 - How does the letter end?

 - Did you find the letter persuasive? Why or why not?

 - What did you like most about the letter?



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Analyzing a newspaper article	
Headline	
Who	
What	
When	
Where	
Why	
How	
Main idea	

What is your opinion on the issue discussed in this article?

What ideas do you have for a letter to the editor?

What position will you take? Why?



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Writing a letter to the editor

What is your thesis – the opening statement that describes your opinion on the issue?

What is your first argument?

What is your second argument?

↓

List two facts or examples that support your first argument.

1.

2.

↓

List two facts or examples that support your second argument.

1.

2.

What is your conclusion – the strong ending statement that supports your thesis?

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Page 1

Time Requirement:
75 minutes

This two-period lesson will help students form opinions and write a persuasive letter to the editor.

Standards:

- ▶ Drawing conclusions/inferences
- ▶ Identifying main idea/essential message
- ▶ Analyzing and/or evaluating information
- ▶ Evaluating validity/reliability of information

To ensure student understanding, it is best to read aloud the italicized instructions embedded in the lesson.


1. Activate prior knowledge: Ask students why people write letters to the editor. Then, ask students to share any experiences they have with letters to the editor. Even if they have not actually written a letter, they may know of someone who has or they may even have felt like writing one. Allow 5 minutes.

2-3. Analysis: As students discover and comment on the characteristics they have noted in the letters to the editor, you can record their observations on the board or chart paper. Point out that the peer pressure letter is about the article they read in the last session (“Expert: Risky teen behavior is all in the brain”). Allow 10-15 minutes.


4-6. Pairs/small Groups: You can have students work in pairs or small groups to find an article and discuss its main idea and details.

Individuals: Note that some students may want to work on their own to find an article that interests them.

Monitor: As you walk around the room, remind students to focus on



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one article. For some reluctant readers and writers, it may be necessary to read with them and/or ask them direct questions about the article and their opinions. Allow 20 minutes.

7. Apply: The graphic organizer helps students focus their thoughts on the

issue(s) raised in the article. This activity also prepares them to think about the opinions they want to express in the letters they write. Allow 10 minutes.

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Page 2


Time Requirement:
75 minutes

8-9. Apply: Reinforce the main components of a letter to the editor before students begin to write. Allow 20 minutes for the planning and writing of the letter. If students need more time, they can finish the letter as homework or the writing can be extended to another day.


Monitor: As students are writing, be sure to circulate and respond to any issues that may arise.

10. Reflect: Students can exchange letters for individual review or volunteer to read their letter aloud for class review. Whatever method is used, the students should focus on answering the specific questions about their peers' work. Allow 10 minutes.

Extension: Students can research the topic they chose and expand the short letter to the editor into a persuasive essay or short research paper.



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- Did you find the letter persuasive? Why or why not?

- What did you like most about the letter?

Adapted from Gardner, T., National Council of Teachers of English, "Persuading an Audience: Writing Effective Letters to the Editor."



As seen in



April 12, 2007

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Peer pressure can be positive force for teenage drivers

USA TODAY's article "Expert: Risky teen behavior is all in the brain" discussed the role peer pressure plays in how likely a teen is to take risks. But peer pressure also can be used as a positive force (Life, April 5).

For more than 60 years, the Ad Council has successfully effected positive social change through communications based on solid research.

Because reckless driving is the No. 1 cause of teen deaths, we did extensive research to find an effective way to stem the problem.

Similar to the article's findings, our research showed that a teenager's need for social connection is his or her most valuable asset.

Our new "UR the Spokesperson" campaign is driven by the strength of that peer-to-peer social connection.

We also found that while they feel invincible, teen passengers will speak up if threatened by a friend's driving, therefore becoming the "spokesperson." Because of the strength of the social connection, the teen driver will listen.

Rather than inferring that peer pressure is always a negative force, we as a society should utilize this knowledge to inform teen outreach and help young people learn to help each other.

Peggy Conlon
President & CEO
The Advertising Council Inc. New York

Good drivers wanted

The always witty Craig Wilson has hit upon a very serious topic: the fact that most people in America don't drive well ("Curbside appeal: Please don't run me over!" Final Word, Life, April 4).

Our cities and society have become much more car friendly and much less people friendly.

The solution? We need a responsible government that requires drivers to go to school longer in order to get their licenses.

Cellphone-yakking, fast food-munching, caffeine-injected knuckleheads can do far too much damage.

If our representatives in Congress were as enlightened and as in touch with the real world as Wilson is, we might have at least one worthwhile law being written up in the next year or two.

In fact, let me be the first to say it: Let's nominate Craig Wilson for president.

Dorman T. Shindler
Kansas City, Mo.