

Letter to the editor

The letter to the editor task presumes that the writer (i.e. the candidate) is a regular reader of the newspaper in question and is interested in online and print media in general. If an article upsets or moves them in any way, they take the time and effort to share their opinion in writing. This opinion can range from enthusiastic support to harsh criticism, and although there is no reliable data to support this statement, we can say that it generally tends to be critical.

While this genre has retained its relevance in print media as well, the internet has further increased its significance. Nowadays online articles reach a wider audience than ever before, and the number of people commenting on an article or post is growing.



What is a letter to the editor like and in what way is it different from a transactional letter?

A letter to the editor is addressed to the editor starting with 'Dear Editor,...' or 'Dear Sir', and is primarily about commenting on one particular article or text. You are expected to share your opinion or stance on that article only.

In real life, the ultimate goal of the writer is to have their letter published in the magazine/newspaper. In order to achieve this, the writer applies a personal, politely informal style while at the same time trying to avoid over-the-top reactions or emotive language, which would make the letter unsuitable for publishing.

Although the letter to the editor does not have such a strict structure as the transactional letter, the text can still be divided into 3 main units which we will explain below.

Opening paragraph

After the greeting ('Dear Editor,...') you should continue with a short description of which article you are writing about. In the Euroexam, you can make up the original article as well as the newspaper/magazine. You then go on to state whether you approve or disapprove of the text. You might also like to mention that you have been an avid reader of the magazine for a while, and then add that on this occasion you approve/disapprove of their article in question. Another possibility you have here is to specify in what capacity you are writing: e.g. as an expert, as a victim or in any other way affected by the issue.

Main body (2-3 paragraphs)

Since this is an argumentative text type, the main body will be made up of paragraphs supporting your main stance outlined in the opening paragraph. You need to present arguments for or against the main stance of the article you are writing about. Bearing in mind the word limit, try to present your main arguments in max.

2-3 paragraphs, concentrating on one issue at a time in one paragraph.

One of the difficulties of this task in the exam context is that the article you are referring to does not exist, and all you know about it is a short description (e.g. 'An article was published in the local online newspaper heavily criticising the cultural facilities of your hometown. You do not think the report was accurate and you write a letter to the editor in which you explain why you do not agree with the article'). Although the article does not exist, part of your task here is to imagine what "was included" in it and what it is you are writing about. In essence, you are sharing your opinion about an imaginary article the details of which have been made up by you. (e.g. 'Contrary to what your writer claims,... our lovely neighbourhood does have...').

In the Euroexam, the topic has been carefully selected so that you will not need more than 1-2 minutes of brainstorming to come up with 2-3 details for the article that you have comments on. It is a good idea to jot down these ideas so that you can see them in front of you when you start writing the letter.

Closing

It is the closing where the letter to the editor most resembles the transactional letter since it is here that you have to explain what you expect from the reader, the editor. Let's have a look at some example:

- you can ask them to write another article looking at other aspects of the story and to incorporate your opinion as well;
- you can ask them to publish a retraction article in

which they admit their unfair treatment of the topic;

- You could ask them to publish your views next to the original article (this is easy in online media);
- you can suggest that they should be more thorough next time they publish a similar article;
- offer your assistance should they need some information for the retraction.

After this, you write your complimentary closing in one short sentence.

The style and level of formality of letters to the editor

In terms of style, the letter to the editor can be formal or informal, and in this respect it is closer to the article or the review than the rather formal transactional letter. Since the writer does not know the editor in person, a polite and distant style should be employed while at the same time contractions (e.g. 'shouldn't' or 'needn't') are allowed in offline and online media anyway. However, it is important to keep the focus on reason and not on emotions.

When it comes to language use, remember that you are contrasting your own opinion with that of the article, therefore it is acceptable to use 'I' and 'my' for your own ideas and 'you' and 'your' for the article. This way you can also let the editor know that you are aware of the fact that he/she is personally responsible for the article even if they haven't written it.

Letter to the editor in the business exam

The features and requirements described above are the same in the general and business exam. The task will be exactly the same, only the context will be different: The audience will be the editor of a business/economic magazine and of course the article you are commenting on will be in connection with business as well.

Useful links

You can find further tips on the genre of letter to the editor on the following websites:

[Swirk Online Education - Letter to Editor](#)

[Community Tool Box - Writing Letters to Editor](#)

Format requirements in the Euroexam writing test

Recommended length: B2 – approx. 150 words; C1 – approx. 200 words. This word count is a recommendation only and normally we do not penalise deviation from it (being overlong is the most common one). However, it is in your own interest to keep yourself to the instructions of the task. Incidentally, counting words is time-consuming and it distracts you from the task. Anyway, before starting the letter, we suggest that you jot down a few keywords and ideas to help yourself decide what to include in the letter and what to leave out.

Using a dictionary in the Euroexam writing test

Although a dictionary is permitted throughout the entire writing test, we recommend that you primarily use your active vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Remember that looking up words in a dictionary is time-consuming and therefore only resort to it if it is absolutely necessary in order to express yourself. The dictionary will probably prove more useful when proofreading your finished letter.