



Toolkit for making public comment

What is a public comment?

- Public comment is a statement to a federal, state, or local agency providing relevant feedback to a proposed rule or regulation.
- While not all decisions require public comment, most will require a public comment period by law.
- Comments can be submitted either virtually or in print as a written format or can be submitted in person as a spoken statement at public hearings.
- You do not have to be an expert on the issue and can provide public comment on specific aspects of the regulation or address it as a whole.

Why are public comments important?

- **Influence:** Commenting is an opportunity to influence or change the rule or regulation and make your voice heard. Regulations that require public comment hearings are required to consider your comments before making final decisions.
- **Perspective:** Commenting ensures that on-the-ground experiences are taken into account. You may be personally affected by this issue or work with people that are affected. So it is very important for you to share your perspective.
- **Fact Check:** Comment periods allow for better regulations. By providing your comments you can ensure that facts, unintended consequences or errors are not overlooked.
- **Offer Alternatives:** Commenting is your opportunity to point out issues, offer alternatives and substitute language, and help decision-makers identify solutions they may not have considered initially.
- **On the Record:** Even if your comments do not end up changing the regulation, they are important for future decision making. Your comments help create the administrative record that an agency or decision-maker has to consider when finalizing a rule or regulation.

Tips for submitting an effective comment

- It is best to prepare a comment that is clear and concise due to time constraints. We recommend a limit of 2 minutes which is an estimated 300 words.

- Research, data points and relevant facts build credibility and are more likely to be taken into consideration.
- Present your argument and make sure to support with a data point. We will provide you with a fact sheet that can be used to create your comment.
- Make it personal!! While facts are a great foundation, decision makers need to know why this is important to you and your community. Paint a story.
- Draw from your expertise. Do not feel shy to drop your credentials, this will only build your credibility. It is important to note that we don't only refer science and academic professionals as expertise. Maybe you're an expert on building insulation and can speak to energy efficiency.
- Cite! A quick, according to the XY&Z our air quality is XYZ. Again this will only build on your argument!
- Lastly, Just write! Get your thought on paper and know that you can always edit and refine your argument.

Letters to the Editor

Why LTE's are important

- They are an important way for the public, policymakers, and the press to get a better-informed understanding of an issue and how the public views it.
- LTEs are an excellent media tactic for “rapid-response” situations and campaigns where we must demonstrate public support/opposition/pressure to a decision-maker.
- LTEs are especially effective for campaigns related to politics and legislation because Congressional staff closely monitor the opinion pages of newspapers in their districts.
- Because many people read letters-to-the-editor (LTEs), they are a quick, effective, and continuing means of communicating your campaign message to a wide audience.
- They can be used to correct and clarify facts in a news story, editorial, or op-ed piece, oppose or support actions of an official agency, direct attention to a problem, spur news editors to cover an issue that is being overlooked, and urge readers to support your cause.

How to write your letter:

Just Write — As soon as you feel inspired to write, sit down and do it. Do not wait, do not look up data, do not get distracted. Just write. Get your initial thoughts out. Add data, correct it, and edit later. Make sure not to wait too long before submitting or it may no longer be timely.

Pick a Timely Topic — Newspapers rarely publish letters about topics that are not being covered in the news. Referring to a previously published article or column will increase your letter's chances of being published. Look at each paper to see how they like to reference the article in LTEs they publish. A specific reference is not always necessary and you shouldn't let not having a reference keep you from submitting.

Research the Guidelines — Most papers' length limit on LTEs is around 250 words. Stick to this so that an editor does not cut out the important points of your letter. Often newspapers want your address and phone number so they can verify that you wrote the letter. You can usually find a paper's guidelines on the letters page in print or online. If not, call the paper directly. Spend some time looking at letters that the paper has already published to get a sense of what opinion editors usually choose to publish.

Tips:

Assume Nothing — Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue. Refer to any newspaper article or editorial by date and title. Also include any relevant credentials that prove you are informed about your topic.

Be Brief — State your position as succinctly as possible without eliminating necessary detail. Keep your paragraphs short. Long rambling sentences and digressions will cause people to lose interest quickly. Stick to one subject.

Maintain Composure — It is okay to express outrage, but it should be kept under control. Avoid personal attacks and focus instead on criticizing specific policies or ideas.

Find a Local Angle — Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how budget cuts or environmental policies will affect this particular readership.

Make it personal — Personal stories and anecdotes are particularly compelling to editors and readers. The less impersonal a letter is the better.

Adapt Form Letters — If you are working from a form letter or a sample letter that was provided to you take some time to personalize and localize it. If you don't have time, don't let that keep you from sending it in. Something is better than nothing.

Follow Up — If your letter doesn't get published within a week, resubmit it and call the paper. Ask for the opinion editor and ask the person if (s)he received the letter and if it will be published.

Four Basic Components of an LTE

1. Include a compelling intro sentence/title
2. Follow with short, clear, factual points.
3. Personalize the issue - how/why does it affect you/your area?
4. End with a call to action.

Sample LTE:

Word count: 125

Title: Great Salt Lake is Already at the Point of Ecosystem Collapse. I Support the Director of the Division of Waste Management and Radiation Control's Decision to Deny A Class V Landfill Permit

Promontory Point Resources has been trying to sneak through a hazardous classification of landfill permit along the shores of the Great Salt Lake. Due to current landfill demand already being met, a Class V designation will necessitate bringing in hazardous waste from other states. This waste runs a likely risk of contaminating groundwater feeding Great Salt Lake, putting more pressure on an ecosystem already on the brink of collapse.

All eyes are on the lake. The Department of Environmental Quality must take full responsibility for the health of GSL and of our people and say NO to Promontory Point Resources plans to devastate the natural ecosystem. I agree with the Director of the Division of Waste Management and Radiation Control's intent to deny this permit.

Name	Location	Word Limit
Daily Herald Extra rchristner@standard.net	Provo	100-200
Deseret News letters@deseretnews.com.	Salt Lake	200
<u>Park Record</u> editor@parkrecord.com	Park City	300
<u>Salt Lake Tribune</u> letters@sltrib.com	Salt Lake	200
Standard-Examiner rchristner@standard.net	Ogden	250