

Write to a News Editor or Elected Official

“The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked what I thought, and attended to my answer. I am surprised, as well as delighted, when this happens, it is such a rare use he would make of me.” Thoreau expressed his opinions in his public lectures and written essays. In fact, he wrote this remark in a lecture called “What Shall It Profit?” that became the essay, “Life Without Principle.”

You may not have the chance to give a speech or to publish a piece of writing on your own. Instead, you can use one of the two traditional outlets for expressing your opinion on an issue: writing either to a news editor or to an elected official. These people look for input from their readers and residents.

ADULT SUPERVISION REQUIRED

WHAT YOU NEED TO FIND OUT

- ✎ An issue or situation that you feel strongly about
- ✎ The best way to contact the editor or official (by e-mail, online form, or written letter)

First, decide upon an issue or a situation that affects you. Is there something wrong in your neighborhood that you believe needs to be made right? Here’s your opportunity to talk about it. The sky’s the limit!

Next, write your thoughts down on paper or in a document on a computer. Describe the issue. Explain your concerns. Offer your opinions and a solution, if you have one. Be polite! Your words could very well be made public. Say what you

need to say in fewer than 250 words. Sign the letter with your first name only and include your age or grade in school. Read your work aloud to yourself and to friends to make sure that it sounds good. Have someone else check your grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

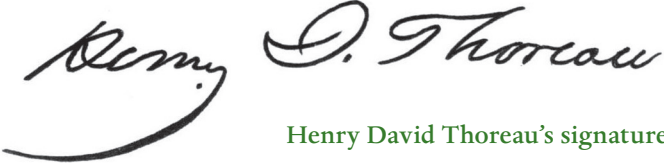
With the help of an adult, look online for contact information. If you want to send your letter to a news editor, you should find guidelines on the newspaper website under the heading “Opinion” or “Letters to the Editor.” If you are searching an elected official’s site, look for “Contact Me.” The official could be anyone, ranging from the president of the country to members of the board who manage your local town, township, or school.

In both cases, let an adult follow the posted instructions. If he sends your letter through

e-mail or an online form, he will have to include his street address, phone number, and e-mail address. Or you can print your letter and send it through the mail.

Don’t worry if you don’t get a response right away. If the news editor is interested in printing your letter, the office will call the sender to get his permission. Then your work will be published for everyone to see. An elected official will often have a staff member respond via e-mail within a few days. The reply will probably include a long statement summarizing the official’s opinions on the issue you raised.

Congratulations on voicing your opinion!



Henry David Thoreau’s signature.
The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods