



# Letters to the Editor: 8 Tips

A letter to the editor (LTE) is a great way to spread awareness about the issue of sugary drinks and the damage they are causing to our health and happiness. You can share your views by writing an LTE to the editor of a local newspaper, an online magazine or another media outlet. Here are 8 tips for writing your LTE:

## 1. Find your angle

- LTEs are more likely to be published by a newspaper or media organization if the sender is reacting to a recent story or an issue that has been in the news lately. This is what the media world calls “your angle” – in other words, what story or event led you to write the LTE.
- Your angle could be a news story you saw about an upcoming community health fair. Or it could be a new report or study about diabetes, obesity, heart disease or dental health (all of which are linked to regular drinking of soda and other sugary drinks). Your angle could be about finding good health information online – a topic that would make it easy for you to let everyone know about the RethinkYourDrinkWV.com website.
- Often, an LTE will express appreciation or concern about a news story or about something that happened locally. (**Note:** See the sample LTE at the end of this tip sheet for an example of how to find a good angle for writing an LTE.)

## 2. Keep it simple

- Write like you talk. Don’t try to sound like an “expert”. Use the kind of words you would use if you were talking about this issue with a friend or neighbor. Be clear and straightforward – and share an important fact or two.
- Read other LTEs in the same newspaper or media outlet. Doing so will help you get a feel for the kind of letters the editors are interesting in publishing. Writing in a similar style is likely to increase the chance that your LTE will be accepted and published.

## 3. Share your perspective

- Talk about sugary drinks from your perspective. Why is this important to you or your family? Why do you want to see more West Virginians choosing healthier drinks? If local residents suffer negative health effects from sugary drinks, what effect does that have on the quality of life in your community or county?
- There are simple ways to let readers know how this issue affects you. If you’re a mom, for example, consider starting a paragraph with the words “As a mother of two children, I believe...”

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#### 4. Try to include a fact or two

- LTEs are a way to share opinions, but most newspapers prefer opinions that are backed up by facts. For this reason, consider including one or two facts that readers may find interesting.
- Here are good places to find interesting facts about sugary drinks and health:
  - ✓ [RethinkYourDrinkWV.com](http://RethinkYourDrinkWV.com) shares a lot of facts about the health effects of sugary drinks.
  - ✓ The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://CentersforDiseaseControlandPrevention.gov) has a web page with important facts.
  - ✓ The [Harvard School of Public Health](http://HarvardSchoolofPublicHealth.org) has a web page with important facts.
  - ✓ The [American Heart Association](http://AmericanHeartAssociation.org) has a fact sheet with helpful information.
  - ✓ [Healthy Food America](http://HealthyFoodAmerica.org) has a lot of different resources.

#### 5. Follow the instructions

- On their websites or in their printed versions, most newspapers and media provide instructions for writing and submitting LTEs. Read these instructions carefully. They may tell you that they prefer LTEs to be no more than a certain number of words (usually, the limit is about 200 or 250 words). They should also provide an email address where you can send your LTE once it is finished.
- Be sure to put your name and address at the end of your LTE. Newspapers usually want this just to confirm that you are the person who you say you are.
- If you are the leader of an organization, it may be appropriate or helpful to add the name of your organization too.

#### 6. Include one or more key messages

- Consider using one of the following messages in your LTE:
  - Sugary drinks are the single leading source of added sugars in Americans' diet.
  - Sugary drinks are linked with a higher risk for Type 2 diabetes, obesity, dental cavities and heart disease.
  - A typical 20-ounce soda contains at least 15 teaspoons of sugar, which is more than double the sugar in a regular-sized Hershey chocolate bar.
  - [RethinkYourDrinkWV.com](http://RethinkYourDrinkWV.com) has a fun and interactive tool that allows people to type in their favorite drink and find better alternatives.

#### 7. Keep it short

- Most newspapers or other media put a limit on the number of words that are allowed in an LTE. This limit is meant to free up space to allow different voices to be heard. Know what your word limit is.

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- After your first draft, don't be surprised if your LTE is longer than the word limit set by the newspaper. It usually takes a second or third draft to decide which sentence or which words can be deleted.
- Sometimes, you can eliminate words by finding a simpler way of making the very same point. For example, consider this sentence:

*There are way too many children and teens living in our county who do not seem to be getting the message that sodas and other sugary drinks can really take a toll on their health.*

That sentence is 35 words long, and it is probably part of the reason why an LTE goes over the limit. Someone can reduce their LTE by 18 words by changing that sentence to read as follows:

*We need to raise the awareness of children and teens that sugary drinks can hurt their health.*

## 8. Mention the RethinkYourDrinkWV.com website

- People like to learn about new resources, so please mention our new website and include the web address in your LTE.
- You might want to let them know that the website has an interactive tool that helps them find alternative drinks that are healthier. Or you could mention that the website has an interactive quiz and other downloadable resources.

### **SAMPLE:** Letter to the Editor

Dear editor:

Thanks for the Times' article (Sept. 8) about the new biking and jogging trail that will soon be opened in our county. This new fitness resource will encourage more people to become physically active, and that's great. But I do hope that people reconsider their drink habits and not just their exercise habits.

Research shows that men who drink a can of soda every day have a 20% higher risk of having a heart attack than men who rarely drink sodas. On the one hand, I'm pleased to see that soda sales have fallen in the U.S. during recent years. I truly believe many families are moving toward healthier choices — water and milk. On the other hand, we should encourage our friends and families to make healthier choices. After all, each of us needs support and positive reinforcement.

I recently discovered a new website that helps people identify a healthier beverage than the one they may usually drink. It's called RethinkYourDrinkWV.com and it has a lot of great information and resources. It was created by West Virginia organizations that care deeply about making our state a healthier place for children and adults.

Sincerely,

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