

Essay #2: Open Letter

The **open letter** is a form of expressive writing usually addressed to an individual but actually intended for the general public (or some subset of the public). The purpose of the open letter is to share valuable opinions, innovative concepts, and new perspectives on an issue trending in the news in an attempt to incite a wider dialogue on that issue with people who agree (and disagree) with you.

For this assignment, **you must write a 3-4 page (typed, double-spaced) open letter that shares your informed thoughts and opinions on a current civic, social, or political issue in the news that you are both passionate and knowledgeable about.** Through the open letter, you will showcase your background, experience and expertise on the issue, and connect what you know with the bigger picture. You must first clearly identify the issue. In addition to explaining the issue and communicating your opinion (i.e., what inspires, angers, excites, worries, etc. you about it), you must also offer realistic solutions. Without solutions, the open letter becomes a useless list of problems and complaints. It becomes an attack, rather than something designed to inspire change. Pragmatic solutions, and not a list of demands, can give an open letter substance; they'll be what encourages the reader to act.

For example, fed up with the media painting a false picture of her, *Friends* actress Jennifer Aniston used her open letter to control her story, writing that she is sick and “tired” of “the objectification and scrutiny we put women through” and of society defining a “woman’s value based on her marital and maternal status.” She ends her letter by appealing to the public to stop “buying the bullshit” served up by tabloids that collectively objectify women and deflect from more critical news stories: “What *can* change is our awareness and reaction to the toxic messages buried within these seemingly harmless stories served up as truth and shaping our ideas of who we are.”

In addition, Andy Ostroy penned a humorous/satirical open letter in August 2016 from the perspective of Donald Trump that essentially denounced Trump’s candidacy for President of the United States by citing his many “lies and flip-flops.” The letter was specifically addressed to Trump supporters, who Ostroy wanted to convey “are nuts!” so as to garner support against Trump becoming president (which did not work out in the end).

Due to its public nature, an open letter is an open invitation for critics. Because you sign your letter with your name at the end, there is an added level of accountability for your words. With that in mind, write your letter as if intended to be printed in *The New York Times* and read by your closest relatives and friends. In order to get all your facts straight and be truly knowledgeable on your issue, you must do your research! **This essay requires you to support your opinion (hence “informed thoughts and opinions”) with adequate evidence from a minimum of 3 secondary sources (books, news articles, journals, etc.).** Wikipedia is not an acceptable source. All secondary sources must be cited in a bibliography.

Due date: Wednesday, November 7, 2018.

Tips/Reminders:

- **Avoid the predictable/simplistic** letter that simply attacks or complains. Your letter must summarize, analyze, argue, persuade, inform, and inspire. Do your research on the issue, and provide readers with an incisive and knowledgeable perspective on the issue, with a practical solution.
- **Audience** – pay attention to your audience. Use the appropriate tone and level of objectivity to appeal to your readers, so as to achieve your writing goals. Avoid name-calling, personal or political smears, and biased or accusatory language (i.e., unverifiable rumors, distortions, half-truths, lies, etc.). Rather, let your argument stand on the strong evidence you provide. Don't simply attack, but inspire.
- **Transitions** – use these to link each point in the argument back to the thesis. Also, use transitional expressions to make links between the points within paragraphs.
- **Secondary sources** – You must use a minimum of 3 secondary sources. Frame every quote, or “sandwich” it between your own words. Never just drop in a quote without explanation or to substitute your own writing.
- **Title your work** – give your essay a catchy and representative title that captures the essence of the subject.
- **Proofread your work** several times! It is your job to correct your grammatical mistakes, not mine. Papers with a low level of language and mechanics will lose points.
- **Plagiarism** – the rules on plagiarism will be strictly enforced. Be careful when paraphrasing others' thoughts. Paraphrases ALSO have to be acknowledged. Document your sources fully.



Original content by Christine Choi, 2018

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