9. Criteria for writing a letter to the editor

In general, people write letters to an editor because they
- have been offended by something published in the paper,
- disagree with something that was published,
- are able to offer an interesting and/or expert opinion and/or additional information
  on something published or a current news event.

In an examination you may be asked to write a letter to an editor to prove that you have understood the article in question and to offer a different way of commenting on it. In any case, the reason(s) for writing a letter to the editor should be pointed out clearly in your text. You might also have to include additional information in your letter to the editor, e.g. from texts you have read or films you have seen dealing with the particular topic.

**Preparation:**
1) Skim the text to understand the author’s general attitude.
2) Scan the text highlighting the author’s arguments.
3) Make a list of the author’s arguments and write your opinion next to every single one of them.
4) Decide on the purpose of your letter, i.e. if you want to criticise, support or add information.
5) Choose one or two arguments according to the purpose of your letter.
6) Structure your letter carefully following the instructions in the next part.

**Writing a Letter to the Editor**
- Follow the rules of a formal letter including addressee and return address, date, salutation (use “Sir” or “Madam” without “Dear”), use of neutral language (see supplementary page: “Sample formal letter”).
  Do not address the editor, however, and omit the closing remark. The letter ends with your name and place of residence.
- In your opening paragraph/introduction state which article, editorial, column, public statement or recent news event you are referring to.
- The body of the letter should have a clear structure with an introductory sentence, main part and concluding sentence.
- Begin the body of the letter by clearly stating the purpose of your letter.
- Make one point (or two at the most) in your letter, for example by pointing out omissions or incorrect aspects of the story you are referring to. Be factual and do not attack the journalist(s) personally. State your point clearly, e.g.
  *The author fails to mention ...*
  *May I draw your attention to ...*
  *I am concerned about ...*
- Put forward a different argument or supply additional information.
- Base your arguments on material you know about the issue.
- If appropriate, you may include a personal perspective or experience.
- Finish your letter with a convincing concluding sentence.

**POINTS TO REMEMBER**
- Keep in mind that you would like to convey a message to the editor.
- Be careful to focus your arguments and references on the message you wish to convey.
- Keep to a neutral (or sometimes even formal) style, avoiding colloquial language, slang and/or taboo words.
- Use linking words to connect your sentences and your ideas (see supplementary page: "Linking words").
9.1 Self-assessment grid: Writing a letter to the editor

Use this self-assessment grid to evaluate your own work. While checking your work, answer the questions below and tick:

☺ - Yes, well done  ☹ - OK, needs some improvement  ☹ - No, needs improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have followed the rules for a formal letter, giving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- addressee and return address,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- date,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- salutation, omitting “Dear”,</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- using “Sir or Madam”.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In the introduction, I have referred to the article or topic in question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have given my letter a body with a clear structure (i.e. introduction, main part and conclusion).</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have clearly stated the purpose of my letter and conveyed the message I would like the editor to accept.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have presented different arguments and expressed my opinion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have referred to suitable material to make my point.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used a neutral (even formal) style.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have produced complete sentences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have structured my letter by writing paragraphs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used linking words to connect ideas and sentences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have checked my spelling/proofread my text with the help of a dictionary.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
10. General advice on writing

In order to produce a text of good quality you have to go through various stages of writing. Here are the most important points you should keep in mind. They will also help you in a "Klausur":

**Preparation**
Plan your written work thoroughly by

1) brainstorming: collecting ideas and materials and/or noting down keywords,

2) narrowing the scope: selecting the points you would like to use in your writing and abandoning those which are inappropriate or not sufficiently significant,

3) structuring: arranging your main points/ideas/arguments in a clear and logical order. Use e.g. a mind map (with numbers) or an outline. Make sure all your aspects are laid out very clearly (i.e. in a few words, using a clear structure).

**Writing stage**

- **Write a first draft** following your plan.
  - Do not spend too much time on finding the right wording/choice of words yet.
  - Leave plenty of space for your own additions and corrections.
  - Read your finished first draft and make first improvements.
  - Use a dictionary to help you with wording/choice of words you were not sure or happy about earlier.

- **Thoroughly revise** your text with regard to
  - content
  - structure/logical order
  - style
  - grammar/sentence structure
  - vocabulary/idiomatic expressions
  - spelling and punctuation
  - (see details in Self-assessment grid: “Revising written texts”)

- **Rewrite** your text: Make a fair copy of your work.

- Always allow enough time to re-read and proofread your text.
10.1 Self-assessment grid: Revising written texts

Use this self-assessment grid to evaluate your own work. While checking your work, answer the questions below and tick:

- ☺ - Yes, well done
- 😐 - OK, needs some improvement
- ☹ - No, needs improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have thoroughly revised my text with regard to content</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have stuck to the task/dealt with all the aspects of the task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have said what I intended to say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have avoided repetition.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have avoided unnecessary aspects.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>structure, logical order, style</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>My text has an introduction, a main part and a conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My ideas, arguments, examples are in the right order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My text has a visible structure, i.e. clear paragraphs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every paragraph contains a topic sentence which states what aspect I am dealing with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My ideas develop from paragraph to paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have used linking words which connect my ideas and sentences and make my text coherent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have put facts into a logical and/or chronological order using appropriate linking words.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I have concluded my argument using linking words like
*in conclusion, to sum up, finally, all in all* ... (see supplementary page: "Linking words").
I have avoided contractions (*isn’t* → *is not, doesn’t* → *does not, won’t* → *will not, there’s* → *there is*) as they are not appropriate in formal writing.
I have eliminated any wordiness, i.e. excluded all unnecessary words.

**Grammar, Sentence Structure**

I have written grammatically correct sentences by using
- the right relative pronouns,
- the correct prepositions after verbs and nouns,
- the correct grammatical constructions which go with certain verbs,
- the correct tense(s),
- clear references, e.g. made sure it is clear who or what the pronouns in my text refer to.
(See supplementary page: "How to improve my writing")
I have used correctly and clearly structured sentences, which are
- complete,
- not long and complicated,
- of varied length and structure.

**Vocabulary, Idiomatic Expressions**

I have
- varied my vocabulary by using synonyms (with the help of a monolingual dictionary),
- taken into consideration that English speakers often prefer verbs rather than nouns to express an idea, e.g. *The point of view allows the reader to identify with the protagonist* rather than: *The point of view allows the reader an identification with the protagonist.*

**Spelling**

I have checked my spelling/proofread my text with the help of a dictionary.