

Writing a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a powerful way to reach hundreds and thousands of people. You can write letters to editors of newspapers, newsletters, magazines—any appropriate printed medium. Letters to the editor can serve two functions: they can applaud an article or efforts made by an individual or organization, or they can point out a shortcoming in society and call for change. In either of these cases, the letter should include information about Habitat for Humanity International and the local affiliate. See below for tips on writing letters to the editor, as well as a sample letter.

Tips

- Use letterhead if possible.
- Include your contact information. The newspaper may contact you for permission before they run your letter. Also, include a signature line with your title, even if it's just "Member of [school name] Campus Chapter" or "Member of Youth United [affiliate name]" or "Member of [school name] Act! Speak! Build! Week committee."
- Be familiar with the publication—what kind of readers it attracts, what types of letters it typically prints.
- It's great if your letter is in direct response to a previously-published article or column. If it is, include the headline and the date published in parentheses.
- Be timely. Don't wait longer than a week to respond to an article, column or local event.
- Make your letter pertinent to that local outlet. Don't send in a form letter especially if you'd be using someone else's words.
- Be short, concise and polite—150 to 200 words (or less).
- Your letter should never attack a group or individual. If you are addressing a problem, define that problem and suggest possible solutions.
- Use proper English and grammar! It helps you to be taken seriously.
- Include all pertinent information (what Habitat is, local affiliate's contact information).
- Check with your affiliate before you submit the letter. Remember, you are representing your campus chapter and/or affiliate, and thus Habitat for Humanity International, so you want to make sure everything is accurate and appropriate.
- If you need assistance, please contact the Youth Programs Departments at (800) HABITAT, Ext. 7546.

*Some newspapers have an e-mail template on their Web sites for sending letters. If you use these, you can omit your address and the newspaper address and just include the text of your letter.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Please send a copy of any published letters to the Act! Speak! Build! Week coordinator (actspeakbuild@habitat.org).

John Mitchell
1234 Archer Way
Anytown, USA 12345
jmitchell@email.com

The Fort Lauderdale News
200 E Las Olas Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

To the Editor:

Thank you for publishing your article on the substandard housing problems in South Florida (“For many, nowhere to lay their heads,” Oct. 25 2004). Substandard and poverty housing is a serious issue.

Fortunately, there is help. Habitat for Humanity of Broward has been building houses with families in need for the past twenty years. Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry. Habitat works with partner families who need a hand up to help them earn their own home both through a realistic, no-interest payment plan and through “sweat equity” work hours on their own and other Habitat homes.

For more information on Habitat of Broward, including how to get involved, visit <http://www.habitatbroward.org>. More information on Habitat for Humanity International can be found at www.habitat.org.

Sincerely,

John Mitchell
President, South Florida High School Habitat for Humanity Campus Chapter
Youth United Chair, South Florida Habitat for Humanity