



# Getting in Print



## Well-Written Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Letters to the editor and opinion-editorial pieces are great advocacy tools. Sending letters to the editor and/or op-eds to your local, regional and national newspapers have an impact because they:

- reach a large audience;
- are often monitored by elected officials;
- can bring up information/perspective not addressed in a news article;
- let people know that, as a teen, you care about the issues facing you and your friends on the road, and allow you to explain why the support of those reading the newspaper is important to making our roads safer for all.

### Letters to the Editor:

- ☒ Respond to an article printed recently in the newspaper or a recent statistic/ report, or highlight an upcoming event.
- ☒ Are generally quite brief, (about 150–200 words), but that will vary by paper. Check the paper’s Web site or editorial page for specifics.
- ☒ Are personal. Make sure to answer the questions “why does it matter to you?” and “why does it matter to everyone else?”.
- ☒ Are written in a timely fashion. In this age of fast-moving news and virtually instant reaction; letters about an especially timely topic often appear within a day or two (and almost always within a week).
- ☒ Are most often submitted via e-mail or fax. Check the paper’s web site or editorial page for contact information.
- ☒ Will need your contact information. Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.

*(See the attached sample Letter to the Editor for inspiration)*

### Op-Eds:

- ☒ Are longer than letters to the editor—usually about 500–750 words. Again, check the paper’s web site or editorial page for specifics.
- ☒ Should be timely, clever and make a strong argument. Make sure to express a freshness of opinion, clear writing and newsworthiness.
- ☒ Include personal experiences and first-person narrative, particularly when they’re in service to a larger idea.
- ☒ Are most often submitted via e-mail or fax. Check the paper’s Web site or editorial page for contact information.

*(See the attached sample Op-Ed for inspiration)*

If your Letter/Op-Ed is printed, let us know! Fax a copy to the Girl Scout Council Office at (202) 274-2161 or e-mail it to [programaa@gscnc.org](mailto:programaa@gscnc.org) We love knowing about your advocacy efforts!

## Sample Letter to the Editor

This Letter to the Editor is written in support of the STANDUP Act. This kind of Letter to the Editor could be edited to support other legislation, as well as to focus on new statistics that may have recently come out. It could also be written to focus on other driving issues facing teens, like texting while driving. Think creatively about ways to make the information timely and relevant.

*\*Remember that this sample is meant to serve as an inspiration for writing your own letter.*

*Make sure you add your own personal touches and don't just copy this word for word.\**

Dear Title (Sir or Madam, Mr. or Ms.) Last Name (name of the newspaper editor),

As a teenager, it's scary to know that more young people die from car crashes than any other kind of accident or disease. Teens aren't bad drivers ... we're inexperienced drivers. We need to get experience behind the wheel safely, and we need as few distractions as possible. Research has proven the benefits of laws that gradually introduce new teen drivers to the responsibility of driving. That's why [state] and other states have Graduated Driver Licensing, or GDL, programs. Effective GDL programs limit driving at night, driving with teen passengers, and using cell phones while driving for brand new drivers.

One of the benefits of Graduated Driver Licensing is that it gives us teens a framework for making good driving decisions. GDL helps us fight peer pressure, too. It's a lot easier to say "It's against the law," than it is to say "No, you can't have a ride home."

The Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act, or H.R. 1895, is a bill in Congress that will encourage states to strengthen their GDL programs. Laws are complicated, and it's not always easy to get information. It's even more complicated when you realize that all 50 states have their own set of rules. Why should teens in one state be safer than teens in another state?

I urge everyone to support strong, effective GDL programs by supporting the STANDUP Act. Call [member of Congress] today and ask for [his/her] support.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe  
Girl Scout Troop #0001  
Anywhere, USA 00000

## **Sample Op-Ed**

This Op-Ed is written in support of National Teen Driver Safety Week. This kind of Op-Ed could be edited to support other Safety weeks/months, as well as to focus on new statistics that may have recently come out. It could also be written to focus on other driving issues facing teens, like texting while driving. Think creatively about ways to make the information timely and relevant.

### **Keeping My Friends and Family Buckled Up**

*A teen's perspective on the importance of National Teen Driver Safety Week*

*By Jane Doe, Girl Scout Troop #0001*

Fall is an extremely busy time for us teenagers. Not only does it mean the return of homework and exams, it means sports and band practices, Girl Scout meetings, football games, homecoming dances and many other extracurricular activities that fill our social calendars and put us back on the roads. Unfortunately though, too many of my peers get caught up in the hustle and bustle and aren't buckling up when they get behind the wheel or ride with others in motor vehicles.

According to the United States Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death for my fellow teenagers and I in the United States. In 2007 alone, 4,540 passenger vehicle occupants 16 to 20 years old were killed in motor vehicle crashes, and more than half (2,502) were not wearing their seat belts at the time of the fatal crashes. According to statistics, in my Girl Scout troop of 15 girls, at least three of us, or 20%, are predicted to get into a car crash within the first year of getting our license

No one will ever know what the outcome would have been for those 2,502 teens had they been wearing their seat belts, but statistics show that in that same year, 72 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants involved in fatal crashes who *were* wearing their seat belts survived the crashes.

I don't know about you, but I want to protect my friends and family. So to help protect **[Your State/County/City]** teens, **[Your school/Girl Scout Troop/etc]** is joining with state and local law enforcement and highway safety agencies as well as dedicated community members to reach out to teens during National Teen Driver Safety Week October **[the third week of October – look up at [www.ridelikeafriend.com](http://www.ridelikeafriend.com) ]**.

As a **[new/upcoming driver OR passenger with my teen friends and family]**, I understand first hand the importance of being reminded that regular seat belt use is the single most effective way to protect myself and other passengers in the event of a motor vehicle crash. As a teenager myself, it is important for me to not let my friends take the "it will never happen to me" attitude by continuously putting their lives at risk by not buckling up. The truth is, deadly crashes can and do happen every day – right in our own backyard. In **[current year] [XX] [Your State]** teens were killed in motor vehicle crashes **[Look for most current statistics here: [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/) ]**

Convincing all teens to buckle up every time they set foot in a motor vehicle, whether as a driver or a passenger, isn't going to be easy. It's a big job and it's going to take the entire community—parents, teachers, neighbors, friends and teens like me—working together to drive that message home. Will you help be part of the change?

Parents, remind your teens to buckle up every time they leave home. And buckle up yourself when you're behind the wheel—lead by example. Teachers, when the final bell rings remind your students to buckle up as they leave the parking lot. Neighbors, wish the teens in your neighborhood a safe trip and tell them to “be sure and buckle up.” Teens, remind your friends to buckle up every time you get in a vehicle and refuse to begin the trip until everyone has done so—regardless of how long or short that trip will be. You might just save their life.

**[Your school/Girl Scout Troop/etc]**'s goal is simple: We're going to save more lives by convincing my fellow young drivers and passengers, in the front and back seats, to always buckle up. That's why we are joining with other state and local highway safety and law enforcement leaders, NHTSA and local volunteers to spread the word: Seat belts save lives, so please, buckle up every trip, every time—day and night.

Jane Doe  
Girl Scout Troop #0001