Letter to the Editor: A Possible First Step to the Research Paper

In order to write an effective letter to the editor on your topic, you need to know minimally the following information:

1. what your specific topic is (narrowed down and focused),
2. what the controversy is, some initial facts and statistics either for or against,
3. at least one expert that you can quote intelligently while making your point.

This means that in order to write an effective letter, you must do prior research about your topic so that you have some information and knowledge.

A letter to the editor is not an emotional tirade (at least, not ours!). This letter states the subject and position right away and then proceeds to explain why the author is taking this position. The letter includes some proof (data, quotes, etc.) to support the position. The letter may include a mention of the opposition and a refute (why you feel they are wrong). A letter to the editor is not accusatory. It is an intelligent debate about a controversial issue that has clearly been thought through and logically explained. The ending of the letter can urge residents to take some specific action, such as writing letters to government agencies or changing their shopping habits.

The letter to the editor must be at least one full page that is typed (do not start half-way down the page or even one-quarter of the way down the page). Put your name at the top (for my purposes) and then start your letter with “Dear Editor.” Double-space, no triple-spacing in-between paragraphs, and use approximately a 12-point font.

If the letter is late or not passed in, you will lose points from your final research paper.