

1. Length limit of letters depends on the newspaper or media outlet. Most local papers in Georgia have a limit of 250 words, about half a page of single-spaced content, or about half the length of these guidelines. Check with the newspaper or media outlet where you intend to submit your letter to be sure you know the word limit. Some papers have a much longer limit of 600 words or more, but the AJC only allows 200 words.
2. Your style of writing and use of language should be conversational [informal] and easy to understand. Try to vary the sentence structure to maintain the reader's interest. For example, in addition to using simple declarative sentences, create introductory phrases, such as "Under these circumstances..." or "Due to the importance of_____." Also vary the length of sentences – a short declarative sentence can make a lasting impression when introducing or concluding a lengthy analytical paragraph. (And you should consider using dashes to help emphasize descriptive phrases or to make a long sentence easier to understand.)
3. To make your views as convincing as possible, quote excerpts from authoritative sources, such as state or federal reports, scientific findings, research institutions, etc. In a short letter of 250 words, using two or three references should be enough to persuade most readers that you are well-informed. Many such references are easily found in searching the Internet. If the media outlet allows it, provide hyperlinks to the source material being cited.
4. Be assertive but not antagonistic. If you are attempting to correct a claim made in a letter or article already published, be respectful when referring to the person who made an erroneous statement. For instance, "In his letter of March 19, Mr. Smith made a misleading statement that is contradicted by the facts." [Or provide critical details that had been omitted.]
5. Whenever possible, try to make general observations that apply to other situations or issues beyond the one you are writing about. For example, in making a complaint about a permit that was improperly issued because it lacked adequate analysis, after providing the types of additional information that was omitted, you could state that these errors occur too often, and then explain how the public is at risk (or is penalized) because of repeated deficiencies.
6. Be sure to explain why the matter you are discussing in your letter is significant. Even if the issue at hand only involves a single local project, you should provide more background about long-term, cumulative consequences if faulty decisions result in a series of bad outcomes. In general, try to think expansively about the takeaway conclusion, especially if the issue suggests a way of preventing additional problems like the one you are writing about.
7. In concluding your letter, when appropriate, urge readers to take action(s) in support of a position you are recommending – such as opposing a permit (say where/when to send comments) or describe legislation that should be created, passed or defeated. If space permits, be sure to thank anyone or any group who has assisted in advancing the position you are recommending.