

A Guide to Writing Letters to the Editor

WHY WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

- Letters sections are prime forums for getting your message to a wide audience.
- Letters in local and regional papers are read by local activists, government officials, legislators and many community members.

DETERMINE THE PURPOSE FOR YOUR LETTER

- To tell readers about an issue or event you are angry about
- To publicly congratulate or support something or someone
- To correct information in an article
- To suggest an idea to others
- To influence public opinion or persuade others to take action
- To influence policymakers or elected officials
- To publicise an organisation's work with a current new issue

WHEN TO WRITE YOUR LETTER?

- Write your letter within two to three days of any relevant date

HOW TO WRITE IT

- Read the 'letters to the editor' of the publication of choice.
- Do your research
- Start your letter with: 'Dear Editor,'
- Be direct: Be original. Make your most important point first
- Write to the level of the readers
- Be respectful and professional in tone
- Keep it short. Keep letters under 200 words.
- Personal details: Make it clear if you want to remain anonymous
- Evidence is key: Show any verified evidence or statistics available
- Personalisation: Tell a personal story, use personal examples
- Direct the readers to a website or organisation that is relevant
- Instruct the readers directly on actions they can take to help
- Name the names of any relevant parties or legislators

ENDING YOUR LETTER

- Have a simple closing
- End with 'Sincerely, your name.'
- Re-drafting and Re-editing
- Make sure it is easy to follow and to the point
- Spell-check your letter Proofread your work.

- Ask someone to read your letter
- Know that your letter may be edited

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCE OF GETTING PUBLISHED?

- Respond directly, either to previously broadcasted or published news articles or commentaries
- Focus on one important point
- Use verified facts
- Specify how readers will be affected by the issue you are addressing
- E-mail your letter in the body of the e-mail
- Subject line should read, "Letter Re: your topic or article name"
- Include your contact details
- Follow the guidelines and word count limit
- Read through other letters to the editor of the paper
- Be Direct. Be Brief

DO NOT

- Do not overstate or exaggerate your point
- Do not insult opponents
- Avoid jargon or acronyms
- Never use capital letters or bold text to emphasise a word
- Do not be put off by rejection or failure. Keep trying