

Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are an amazingly powerful advocacy tool.

- They are among the most widely read sections of newspapers and magazines.
- They are closely monitored by legislators to find out what voters are thinking and hearing.
- They can strengthen the impression of widespread support of or opposition to an issue.
- They can influence editorial writers to take a stand.
- They can influence other members of the media to probe an issue more deeply.

Here are some tips to help you get your letters to the editor published:

1. Check out preferred length, style and format by reading letters currently in the publication. Look for submission requirements in the publication. Most publications prefer letters to be 250 words or less. Be succinct.
2. Timeliness is key. Many major newspapers now publish letters responding to articles, editorials or other letters *the day after* they appear. The easiest way to respond quickly is via email. Many publications also allow you to submit letters directly through their websites. For direct Internet access to the media, you can use the NETWORK website <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/dbq/media/>
3. A letter is more likely to be published when written in response to something that has appeared in the publication. When you respond, include a reference to the article, letter or editorial, e.g., “As someone who has experienced poverty firsthand, I find John Cole’s assertion that current welfare laws are working to be far from the truth (Op-ed, 4/5/05).”
4. You may also time your letter for an event you know is coming, e.g., a letter on taxes just before April 15.
5. Make sure your lead sentence is compelling. You want to draw the reader’s attention.
6. Limit your letter to one topic.
7. Try to provide a local slant by including the impact of the issue on your local community.
8. Make your letter lively but reasonable. Verify facts, and make sure quotes are accurate. Depending on the issue, consider using humor or a personal story. Refrain from personal attacks.
9. If using a sample letter from an organization, take time to rephrase in your own writing style.
10. Include your name, organization (if applicable), address and telephone number(s). Newspapers will often only publish a letter if they are able to contact the signer to make sure s/he is the author.

Consider expanding your media activism to include op-eds, contact with radio and TV shows, writing articles for publication, etc. For further information about how you can do this, contact NETWORK Communications Coordinator Stephanie Niedringhaus at 202-347-9797, ext. 224 or sniedringhaus@networklobby.org

Please send copies of your published letters to NETWORK. We’d like to celebrate with you!