

Tips for Writing Successful Letters to the Editor

Why Letters to the Editor Matter:

- **Reaching the Public.** Surveys of newspaper readers show that the letters page is one of the most closely read. If you can get your letter published, it will be read – this makes the Letter to the Editor one of the best ways to quickly get your message out to an audience.
- **Reaching Policymakers.** Policymakers also read the letters section to get a sense of public sentiment on issues in the news.
- **Amplifying the Message.** If editors receive many letters from the same point of view on the same topic, they are likely to publish one or two of them. Even if your letter isn't chosen, it may help get another one published.
- **Driving Coverage.** Editors know what the public cares about largely through the letters they receive. Enough letters to the editor on an important story may help sway editors to keep the issue in the news, rather than allowing it to fade away.

Tips on Writing Good Letters and Getting them Published:

- **Be Clear and Concise.** Keep your letters brief and to the point. Newspaper editors often edit for length, so try to keep your letter to less than 200 words. The shorter it is, the more likely it will be printed – and the less likely editors will edit out your favorite sentence!
- **Keep to One Topic:** Letters are just too short to make many, complicated points. Figure out what your key message is, and keep your letter focused on that one subject.
- **State Your Point Early:** Be sure to state your main point in the subject line and in the first sentence of the letter.
- **Reference a Recent Article:** If possible, it is best to include a reference to a recent article that appeared in the newspaper you've selected and then write your letter as a response, building on what was printed or pointing out how your viewpoint isn't included. While this increases the likelihood of getting published, if your local newspaper hasn't covered a story, that doesn't mean it's off limits. It's fine to write a letter about a pressing national issue even if it hasn't been in your paper in the last day or two.
- **Letters in your own words are most likely to get printed.** Once you decide on the theme you want to write about, put the main point in your own words.
- **Include Your Contact Information.** Most 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.