



## **Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor**

### **Be brief**

150 words or less is a good rule of thumb. Brevity increases the likelihood that the editor will have time to read your letter and consider it for publication. Absolute word count limits vary by newspaper, so check with your local paper for specific guidelines.

### **Get local**

Editors are generally more interested in letters that highlight the local impact of a domestic, national, and/or global issue. Sometimes you can do this by responding to an article or op-ed that was recently published in the newspaper.

### **Ask for specific action by specific officials**

Elected officials and their staff members carefully monitor newspapers to gauge local opinion. By mentioning your elected officials by name, and stating the specific action you would like them to take, you can impact their positions on issues.

### **Be timely**

Tracking your local newspapers for opportunities to hook the designated topic to a particular article or editorial is an effective method to increase the likelihood of publication. If possible, you should submit your letter within one to three days of the publication date of the article to which you are responding.

### **Demonstrate your reach**

If you know that your opinion is shared by others (a statement by your national faith group for example), mention it. However, if you want to submit a letter signed by representatives of the group(s), please note that most newspapers limit signatures to two or three names.

### **Be polite and respectful**

Avoid personal attacks.

### **Personalize your letter**

Brainstorm personal or local ties to the topic and weave those into your letter:

- Why is this important to you?
- Is there a local connection? If so, what is it?
- Who are the relevant elected officials (if any)? What do you want to see changed or achieved?
- Can you respond to a specific event or article? Cite the date of the event or the article and date.

## Outline your letter

1. State your main point, with appropriate references to an event or article. Some options for opening statement include taking issue with a comment from someone interviewed for a story, adding to the discussion by pointing out something readers need to know, disagreeing with an editorial position, or pointing out an error or misrepresentation in an article.
2. State why the issue is important to you: impact on local community, personal investment, etc.
3. Provide facts, quotes, and/or data (briefly!) to support your position—be careful about accuracy.
4. Briefly restate your main point.
5. State your recommendation (desired action or outcome).
6. What is it you would most like for your readers to remember? Consider the central point you want people reading the letter to take away.

## Send your letter

- **Utilize your options:** Letters to your local paper have the best chance of being published and are most likely to catch the attention of your legislators, though you may certainly submit to state and national publications as well.
- **Provide complete contact information:** The newspaper may contact you to verify that you wrote your letter. You must include your full name, mailing address, e-mail, and phone number on the letter.
- **Review your letter carefully:** Consider asking a friend or colleague to review your letter.
- **Submit the letter in the body of your e-mail:** Generally, editors prefer to have your letter printed within the body of your message, and not as an attachment. The e-mail address for submissions is usually printed in the editorial section of your paper.

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Contact Heather Rice, NRCAT's Associate Policy Director, at [hrice@nrcat.org](mailto:hrice@nrcat.org) with any questions or concerns.