

Tips on writing effective letters-to-the-editor

Letters-to-the-editor is one of the most-read parts of the newspaper. In general, the smaller the newspaper, the more a letter-to-the-editor is read and taken seriously.

- You can sometimes find a paper's guidelines for letters-to-the-editor on the letters page.
- Newspapers prefer that your letter be typed.
- What is the one important point you want to focus on? Usually, readers will be most interested in what the issue means to you, or to them, or to the community.
- The shorter the letter the better. Most newspapers limit such letters to 200-250 words. If you send a letter longer than their limit, there is a good chance they won't print it at all, or that they will chop it down to the limit. Wouldn't you rather decide how to edit your own letter?
- If possible, reference a recent article or another letter. Doing so will increase the chances your letter will be printed.
- If you find yourself with "writer's block," imagine running into a friend on the street. What would you say to them? Then just write that down. Adopt a conversational writing style.
- Humor is welcome. Make sure it is real humor, though, not insults, name-calling, or personal attacks pretending to be humor. Readers and editors are sick of that.
- Once you have a draft, review it: Have you used specific, definite, concrete words, rather than general, vague, or abstract words? Have you included facts sparingly? One fact is plenty. Are you are sure of your facts?
- When you're finished, try out your letter on a friend or relative. They may catch something that got by you.
- Many papers will call you to make sure you really wrote the letter, so please add your name and address and day and evening phone number. When printed, the letter will usually only include your name and city.