

# How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are one of the most widely read sections of the newspaper. They are a quick, effective and continuing means of communicating your message to a wide audience. Letters can correct and clarify facts, oppose or support actions of an official agency, direct attention to a problem, spur news editors to cover an issue that is being overlooked, and urge readers to support your cause.

**BE TIMELY** — Newspapers rarely publish letters about topics that are not being covered in the news. Referring to a previously published article or column will increase your letter's chances of being published.

**ASSUME NOTHING** — Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue.

**MAKE SPECIFIC REFERENCES** — Refer to any newspaper article or editorial by date and title. Editors prefer to print letters that respond to a specific article. For example: "I strongly disagree with Senator \_\_\_\_\_'s position against open space preservation funding, 'To Be or Not to Be' June 22."

**KEEP IT SHORT** — Most newspapers' length limit on LTEs is 250 words or less. Stick to this so that an editor does not cut out the important points of your letter. Keep your paragraphs short. A short, focused letter is more likely to get published, and be read by readers skimming the page.

**KEEP IT FOCUSED** — State your position as succinctly as possible without eliminating necessary detail. Long rambling sentences and digressions will cause people to lose interest quickly. Stick to one subject or point.

**FIND A LOCAL ANGLE** — Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how budget cuts or environmental policies will affect this particular readership.

**BE INSIGHTFUL** — Do not simply restate previous points of view. Readers want quick, insightful analogies and fresh, new perspectives.

**MAINTAIN COMPOSURE** — It is okay to express outrage, but it should be kept under control. Avoid personal attacks and focus instead on criticizing specific policies or ideas.

**PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT INFO** — Be sure to include your full name, address, phone number and occupation at the bottom of the letter. Often newspapers want this information so they can verify that you wrote the letter. Most newspapers will not publish

your letter without this information, but when printed, will only include your name and city.

**CC: YOUR LEGISLATOR(S)** — If it's relevant, Cc the letter to your legislator(s).  
<http://janus.state.me.us/legis/>

**AVOID FORM LETTERS** — Do not send the same letter to two papers in the same circulation area. A form letter sent to papers in different markets should look like an original and all letters should be sent individually (do not address a letter to more than one paper).

**DON'T FORGET THE SMALLER NEWSPAPERS** — Smaller local papers are more likely to print your letter. This can spark local interest and suggest specific community action.