

GETTING NOTICED: WRITING A GREAT LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are one of the most important tools for any communication plan and a great way to broadcast your organization's message. The opinion section of the newspaper is often the most highly read; submitting an LTE is a great way to get the attention of your policy makers and to educate the general public. LTEs are simple to write, and best of all they offer FREE publicity!

How Can we Use a Letter to the Editor?

LTEs can be used to respond to an article or opinion, or event you support or oppose, correct misleading facts, or simply be a statement of your opinion on an issue. For example, if you are upset with your elected official's views on a particular issue effecting your group, write a LTE to your local newspaper about it.

A few tips for successful LTE-writing:

Keep it short and simple

- ✓ Your point will get lost if your message isn't straightforward and clear. LTEs are generally under 250 words.
- ✓ Check the guidelines for your local newspaper—each has different restrictions. Stick to one subject in your letter.

Be specific and timely

- ✓ If you are responding to an article or debate, make sure you submit it ASAP, or else its relevance will be diminished.
- ✓ Make sure to identify the name and date of the article you are responding to, and to outline the particular issue you are covering.

Name names

- ✓ Name specific elected officials involved in the issue—it will get their attention. If an elected official's name is in the paper, they will hear about it and they will listen.
- ✓ Make sure to name your organization if you are active in the issue; it's a great way to get more publicity.

Call for action

- ✓ Use an LTE to encourage readers to take a particular, specific action, such as contact their elected officials, come to a meeting/rally, or get involved in a certain organization.

Be accurate

- ✓ Back up your arguments with accurate facts and figures. Use your credentials to establish credibility.

Be engaging

- ✓ Don't be afraid to be blunt in your letter, and make sure to have an eye-catching title. Newspapers love controversy.
- ✓ Your LTE has a greater chance of being published if it is engaging and evokes a reaction from the reader.

Be local

- ✓ Give your LTE a local spin and tie it into local sites, issues or personalities. Newspapers are more likely to print it if it is relevant to the community they serve.

- ✓ For example, if you are writing about a global issue such loss of natural areas, remember to tie it into local politics and include how it is directly affecting your neighborhood.

Include your contact information

- ✓ Most newspapers require that you include your full name, address, day and evening phone number, and email address (if applicable).
- ✓ Papers will usually call you before they publish your letter to verify that you are the author and live in the area.

Target multiple newspapers

- ✓ Have different members of your group each send an LTE to a different newspaper. Make sure the text in each letter is different, but the message the same.
- ✓ Having multiple letters about a particular issue appear in the media at the same time will show that the issue has a lot of diverse support from the community.

Be persistent

- ✓ If your letter doesn't get published the first time around, try, try again.
- ✓ Try modifying the angle of the story while keeping the same underlying message, or submitting it to different papers.