How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Almost all newspapers publish letters from the public. These “letters to the editor” can be a good opportunity for you to get the word out in your community on issues that concern you. Editors are often looking for new voices to appear in their letters section to generate other reader interest. Not every letter you write will be published in the paper, but these tips might help increase your chances.

Tips

Do your homework. Before writing, find out your newspaper’s rules on submitting a letter. These can often be found on the paper’s website, usually under the opinion section.

Start off on the right foot. The first sentence sets the tone, so open your letter with a strong statement.

Keep it short. Some newspapers restrict the length of the letter they will consider for publication, so aim for 250 words. Be sure to stay under the newspaper’s word limit. Going over the suggested word count practically guarantees it will not run. Or, the editor may edit your letter down so it will fit. In this case, a point that you think was important may be cut due to space constraints.

Stay on point. Your letter should stick to one or two points maximum in order for it to be effective. Think of it this way: If you wrote a letter on farm animals, you wouldn’t want to get side-tracked and start talking about the fur industry.

Don’t wait. Editors prefer to publish letters that are timely and those that respond to an article, editorial, or previous letter that appeared in the newspaper. If an article on an animal issue appears in your newspaper, respond fast! It’s best to submit your letter the same day the article runs (this can be done through e-mail).

Be nice. A letter to the editor is a great way to give your opinion on a previous article or disagree with someone’s statement. In the beginning, be sure to mention the original letter or article including the title and date it appeared. And remember: Do not resort to personal attacks. There is an effective way to get your message out without putting down another reader or reporter.

Get the facts. It’s helpful to include numbers and other facts on the issue at hand. Double check your facts before submitting your letter. You don’t want someone to write a response to your letter pointing out an error of fact that could have been caught with a simple proofread. (Example: 28,000 animals instead of 2,800.)

Last sentences stay with readers. End your letter with a statement or fact that you want your audience to remember.

Get a second opinion. Have someone you trust read your letter before you submit it. By doing this, you can make sure your letter is clear and makes sense.
Sign off. Newspapers will not run anonymous letters. Remember to include your name, address, and phone number. You can even put your age and/or grade so the editor knows you are a student. Editors will often call to verify that you – and not someone else – wrote the letter.

Space out your letters. Newspapers often don’t reprint the same person’s (or organization’s) letter if they are sent within short periods of time from one another. For most papers the rule is one published letter per month, but check with your paper to find out.

Don’t give up. Not every letter you write will be printed. If your letter is not published, don’t be discouraged – try again.

Submitting a Letter to the Editor to Maui News

Letters must include the writer's name, address and a telephone number where the writer can be reached. Letters will be edited for clarity, accuracy and length. Letters are limited to 250 words. No poetry is accepted.

Letters to the Editor are submitted online for Maui News. To submit your letter, visit the web address below:

http://vnr.oweb.net/vnr/add_submission.asp?categoryID=769&publicationID=110