

GUIDELINES ON WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Well-written letters to the editor are powerful political tools. Signs, radio spots and TV advertisements are expensive. Letters to the editor are free, effective, and are read by a large number of people.

Most people are afraid to write a letter to the editor. It is difficult to write the first one. Letters after the first one get progressively easier. Newspaper editors are generally happy to receive letters to the editor and publish most of what they receive. To attract newspaper editors and interest readers the letters should be literate, to the point, sane and on locally relevant issues.

Following are tips on writing an effective letter to the editor:

- select a topic that people are interested in,
- describe how the topic affects local people,
- base your letter on what you think will affect the readers,
- have one problem and goal that the letter will address,
- use facts from objective sources that relate to the problem,
- describe how your recommendations will help solve the problem.

Do not waste your time with labels such as liberals, conservatives, environmentalists, etc. The letter should be as short as possible. Many people will not read long letters. One format for letters that is particularly effective is to first summarize the point you want to make, then write the logic behind the point, and finally summarize the point you just made

The letter does not have to be perfect. A good plan is to decide on a goal, make an outline, gather facts, write the letter, revise and shorten it, do a spelling check and submit it to the paper by email. A good letter that is published is better than trying to write a perfect letter and not finishing it.

When you write a letter submit it to all the papers in the local area. Word limits and other conditions vary from one paper to another; some will accept letters via email and other require that submissions be made on a web-based form. Most papers require that you include your full name, mailing address and phone number and will accept a maximum of one letter a month

Letters to the editor are especially effective if you can have at least one letter on the same topic in the paper each week. You can do this by collecting a number of writers and have individuals sign up for separate weeks. This is much more effective than having several letters in one week and none for a month.