

## How to write a letter to the editor

Newspapers take letters to the editor seriously. A letter to the editor should be from an individual person or someone who represents a group of people in the community served by the newspaper.

### Tips:

- Always address your letter to Dear Editor or whenever possible, use the actual name of the editor. Don't use salutations like Dear Sir or To Whom It May Concern.
- Don't write a letter just to advertise an event. This can usually be covered in the community calendar section of the newspaper.
- Letters should be short – a maximum of 3-5 short paragraphs or a total of 200 – 300 words.
- Write about an issue that is important to you or your community group and focus on that issue. You may have to focus on one or two parts of a larger issue. For example, writing about impaired driving instead of the larger issue of alcohol abuse.
- Try to coordinate letter writing with other groups or concerned individuals in your area. For example, one group/person may wish to send a letter to their daily paper while another might send a letter to their weekly paper. Each of you could choose to address different parts of a larger topic as well.
- State your opinion and tell the readers what you would like them to know. Keep in mind that a letter to the editor does not always have to be controversial.
- If the letter is to correct an inaccuracy, briefly mention the misconception or inaccuracy, but don't give it much space (you don't want to reintroduce the negative point to an even larger audience).
- You can include appropriate data or statistics to emphasize your point of view but keep them brief, perhaps one or two.
- In the last paragraph, draw a conclusion or ask for an action such as calling a toll-free number for more information or visiting a website.
- Don't forget to provide your full name, the organization's name (if applicable), address and telephone number. The editor may want to check to make sure you are who you say you are or to clarify some point in the letter. If your issue is urgent, be sure to include both a nighttime and daytime phone number.
- You can follow-up with a phone call to the editor's office to ask if your letter arrived and if it is being considered for print.

### Reference:

Centers for Disease Control, September 2002. *Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication*.