Writing letters to the editor

Letters to the Editor are one of the most widely read sections of a newspaper and reach a large audience. These letters often influence what topics the newspaper covers, and are widely read by politicians and their staff.

The newspaper only has limited space, so not all letters are published. The more letters received on a particular topic, the more likely they are to publish at least one of the letters on the topic. So if you don't get your letter published, but other letters on the same topic are published, don't give up—your letter may have been the one that made the difference.

If you see an article in the paper that has an industry or government spokesperson who says something that is challengeable or does not mention an important point, this is your chance to write a great letter to the editor. Here are some tips on how to go about writing the best letter you can.

A few simple rules

- **Keep it short.** Shorter letters (50–200 words) are more likely to be published. If your letter is too long and it still gets printed, a sub-editor is likely to lop off paragraphs, which may change the meaning of your letter. It’s better for you to do the lopping yourself before you send it.

- **Stick to one concise point.** You can’t cover everything when you’re writing about a complicated issue in 200 words. If you have more to say you can write another letter tomorrow.

- **Humour is good.** Include a funny line if you can, but avoid sarcasm.

- **Use short sentences.** This makes it easier for the reader to understand your point.

- **Keep your language plain and simple.** Only use long words if you need to and can’t think of a suitable alternative.

- **Be factual** and highlight aspects of the issue that haven’t been previously addressed.

- **Statistics often impress** some editors, so throw in some numbers or percentages if you have them handy, but make sure they are accurate. If you get them wrong, it undermines your message.

- **Be economical with your words.** Go over the letter and take anything out that is repetitive.

- **Include your name and address and a daytime phone number.** Many newspapers will only publish a letter after verifying the author’s contact information. When printed, the letter will usually only include your name and suburb.

- **Send letters to smaller newspapers.** Small newspapers are more likely to print your letter and the letter can then spark local community action.

- **If possible, get someone else to read the letter before you send it,** preferably someone with less knowledge of the subject than you. If they ask you to explain anything, you need to make your letter a bit clearer.

- **And of course, check the letter for typos, spelling and grammar before you send.**

You can send your letter to the newspaper by email, fax or post. If you are emailing, put the letter in the body of the email, not as an attachment.

Good luck - get out there and start writing!

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Letters to the Editor

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