

## How To Get Your Letter Published (Or at least increase your chances...)

The value of a 'Letter to the Editor' published in your local, state or national newspaper cannot be underestimated. Letters to the Editor are one of the most widely read sections of the paper. Letters are seen as a gauge of how certain opinions, issues, or decisions are received by the public. Letters reflect the concerns and beliefs of readers in the same way that talkback radio reflects the views of its listeners. Politicians, their staff, and other decision-makers read letters, too. Here are some hints to help you get your letters published:

### Read

Read the letters pages frequently, and note the types of letters that get published. You will get a feel for the sorts of letters that get printed, and the style of language used in them.

### Follow rules

Research the guidelines for letters to your chosen paper. If it says less than 200 words by e-mail, make sure you follow that instruction. An email of two or three sentences is more likely to get published than a lengthy essay!

### Be polite

Be witty and use your words in amusing or powerful ways, but don't ever be rude or abusive.

### Be informed

It helps to include facts and figures to support your views. If you do this, make sure you get them right. If you're not sure of something, double check or don't say it. Try to avoid using too many statistics though, because it's the message itself that counts.

### Pick your points

Think of one or two key points to get across. It's better to cover one thing well, than five things poorly.

### Stay on track

Write clearly, stick to the message. If you can make your point in less than 150 words, leave it at that. Keep it short. If you can think of something catchy or memorable, use it.

### Act quickly

Most letters relate to issues or stories the paper has covered. If there is a relevant story or issue, respond quickly, preferably by e-mail so it arrives on the same day. If you can send an email before midday it may be more likely to get published, but

it's better to send something late in the day than nothing at all.

### Get the basics across

The general readership may not know much about the subject. Make sure you write your letter as if the audience knows nothing, or very little, about the issue you are covering, but don't talk down to readers. It helps if you imagine you're explaining something to a friend who has asked for basic information.

### Include contact details

Always give your name, address, phone contact, and e-mail. Editors usually need to verify authorship.

### Revise and edit

Like anything written for public scrutiny, you need to read, re-read, edit and focus your letter on the message(s) you want to get across. Check your spelling and punctuation, or get someone else to check it for you.

### Pass it along

Let others know there's an issue that needs attention - don't just assume they'll see it for themselves. Encourage them to write in as well (an email list can help you do this).

### Keep records

Keep copies of letters you've sent, and the contact details for papers. Often the same issues come up again and again, and it saves time if you can look at your past letters.

### Don't give up

It doesn't matter if you don't get published the first time, or even the twentieth time. Keep trying, because practice pays off. Remember that the more people who write letters on a particular issue, the more likely it is that at least one of those letters will get published. It doesn't matter if it's not yours (although it's nice when it is). Good luck!