

Tips on writing a letter to the editor (LTE)

Contributing to the news is a crucial means of affecting public policy and getting traction on an issue. Below are tips on writing letters to the editor, a simple and effective way to get a message to both the public and policy makers.

Writing a letter-to-the-editor (LTE) to your local or regional newspaper is a very effective means to reach a large audience with your message. LTEs are printed on the editorial page, which is one of the most read pages in the paper. Congress members keep a close eye on media coverage, including LTEs, in their local papers. Monitoring the media helps members keep track of which issues are important to their constituents. So having a strong LTE published is a 'twofer'—you can reach both a wide public and your elected officials with the same effort.

And even if your letter is not published, it can educate and persuade the editors. The more letters they receive on a given topic, the more likely they are to dedicate more time in their newspaper to that issue—both on the editorial page and in news articles. Letters tell a newspaper which issues are important to the community.

How do I write a letter to the editor?

1. Respond to an article in the paper, if possible. Many papers require that LTEs reference an article that ran in the paper. Some papers do occasionally print LTEs noting a lack of coverage. However, letters in response to an article in the paper have the best chance of getting published.
2. Follow the paper's guidelines to increase the likelihood that your letter will be printed. If you can't find the information you need, simply call the paper and ask how to go about submitting a letter in response to a recently published article. It's important to note any requirements like word count or including your name, phone number and email address.
3. Be timely and send your LTE via email if possible. Respond to an article in two or three days. If you can, send it to the newspaper the same day they publish the article.
4. Refer to the legislator you are trying to influence by name. If the letter to the editor includes a legislator's name, it will show up in their daily summary of press coverage in their state or district -- staff may even send him or her the letter to read personally if it is compellingly written.
5. Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting. In general, letters should be under 175 words. Stay focused on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s) and get to the main point in the first two sentences. If your letter is longer than 200 words, it will likely be edited in ways that you may not like or it won't get printed at all.
6. Include your contact information. Be sure to include your name, address, and daytime phone number; the paper will likely contact you before printing your letter to verify that you sent it
7. Clip out your printed letter and send it to your legislator with a brief cover note. This way you can be certain that he or she sees it and helps you build a relationship with them.
8. Reference your IPL and the great work that IPL members in the state are doing on this issue.

What can I say in my letter to the editor?

- [Short summary of messages]
- [Importance of being clear in the ask]
- [Importance of asking for your Senator to support the bill]

SAMPLE LETTER

Your article on [Date], entitled “[article title]”, reminded me why the U.S. Senate needs to pass comprehensive climate and energy legislation this year. The unfolding oil catastrophe in the Gulf makes it clear that our current national approach to energy is not working. The energy policy we have now, which devastates human health and God’s creation, represents a profound moral failure.

I am a member of Interfaith Power and Light, which represents [NUMBER] congregations in [STATE]. Members of Interfaith Power and Light nationwide are taking action by reducing our energy use to take care of creation while saving money our electricity bills. Here in [State], we have [short example of good work your IPL has done].

But we also need thoughtful national legislation to address this problem. We all need to let Senators [Name] and [Name] know that we want the U.S. Senate to set a strong cap on global warming pollution to protect vulnerable communities from further destruction and support our rapid transition to clean energy. [STATE-SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON POLICY HERE]

[Name] [Title]

[City]

[State] Interfaith Power and Light