



Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor can be a useful way to share your knowledge with your college/university leadership, the local community, policymakers and other targeted audiences. Community leaders regularly read the opinion pages of newspapers for clues about issues of concern in their community. In addition, letters to the editor are a way of reaching a much wider audience with your messages and are a fairly simple and effective way for you to be a voice for the discipline, your department and your college/university.

Below are suggestions for writing letters to the editor and getting them printed.

Letter to the Editor Strategies

Check the newspaper print guidelines for the outlets you are targeting—Most newspapers have a website. Check the paper’s website or the editorial page of the print version for information about submitting a letter to the editor. Most newspapers have an online submission form which you can use.

Keep your letter brief and to the point – Letters should be concise—typically newspapers have a word limit of about 250 words (about 3 paragraphs). Editors are less likely to print long letters.

Make your letter timely – Tie the subject of your letter to a recent article, editorial or column already published in the newspaper you are targeting. Use that article as a hook for communicating your message. Small-circulation newspapers usually print many of the letters they receive. It is more challenging to get a letter printed in a major metropolitan newspaper, so don’t be disappointed if it doesn’t get printed.

Localize your letter – Explain how the topic/subject you are addressing affects the readership/community who is the target audience of the newspaper. Lend credibility to your letter by noting your professional experiences in the community that prompted you to write on the topic.

Use “levels of thought” as a method for organizing your letter – You can use levels of thought to structure your letter to the editor. Begin your letter with a big idea or value (level one) that provides a context for understanding the more specific details (levels two and three) of your communication.

Be mindful of the tone of your letter – The tone of your letter can either support or overpower the substance of the message you are trying to communicate. Therefore, choosing and controlling tone is an important element of your communication.

Write about good news, not just bad – Thank the paper (when appropriate) for its positive and accurate coverage of communication discipline-related articles. Or thank a local leader or policymaker for being a champion of a communication-related program, project or research.

Include your name, title, address and daytime phone number – Editors like to confirm that the letter was actually written by the person whose name is on it. Also be sure to provide your professional title and affiliation, as it lends credibility to your letter.

Consider other newspapers for publication – Many metropolitan areas have free weekly community newspapers that go to thousands of homes. Many cities also have newspapers for specific ethnic groups or other targeted populations. Consider sending your letter to the editors of these other widely-read publications.

Mail/email a copy of your published letter to key targeted audience(s) such as college/university leadership and/or policymakers – Community leaders, policymakers and other decision-makers often subscribe to local newspapers. You can continue to build relationships with targeted audiences by sending copies of your letter to them.