

Letter to the Editor (LTE) Quick Tips

- 1. Know Your Audience.** Are you writing to a local newspaper? If so, your letter will be strengthened by touching on issues specific to your state and/or community. If you're writing to a national newspaper or magazine, then focus on issues of national importance, unless the specific article you are referring to is about a local event. Always include the title of the original piece in the first sentence of your letter and reference it. Some quick examples include:
 - The *Times'* May 18 editorial "Racial Profiling Works" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
 - I strongly agree with [author's name] view on the need to reform public school policies on bullying.
 - Congressman Doe's efforts to establish new TSA procedures ["Title of the Article," date] will be a blow to our civil liberties.
- 2. Keep it brief.** Different publications prefer different lengths, but the maximum length is usually no more than 200 words, and more commonly 150. Check previously written LTE's on the publication's website to get an accurate sense of the outlet's preferred length.
- 3. Respond quickly.** Try to write and submit your LTE the same day as the original story appeared. The first 24 to 48 hours after something has happened or appeared are your best window to respond. Obviously, there are exceptions to this rule such as the release of books or ongoing events.
- 4. Focus on one issue or point.** If there are multiple points in an article you want to respond to, you'll need to be extraordinarily concise or write multiple LTE's and have someone else sign for you. Focusing on a single point keeps your argument pithy and overly complicated letters don't run.
- 5. Personalize your message.** Local editors receive dozens of letters every day and national editors receive hundreds. If you want your letter to stand out, make sure that it is not copied word-for-word from a form letter. If you have a personal story that shows how this issue affects you and/or your family, share it — briefly.
- 6. Be polite.** You can be critical of the paper, author or information that the outlet had previously written, but it must always be written in a civil tone. Papers don't publish insulting letters. When sending the letter, make it clear you're receptive to any edits or revisions.
- 7. Proofread.** Any typo or grammatical error in a letter will diminish your chance of getting published. Always double-check before submitting and have someone else review it before you send it in.
- 8. Always include your contact information.** When you send in your letter, you must include your name, address and daytime phone number. Your address is important because papers prefer to print letters from local readers, and it lends credibility. Also, include your phone number because most newspapers will only print your letter once they have called and verified that you are, in fact, the writer. We recommend you provide a cell phone number to guarantee you can be reached.
- 9. Volume counts.** Sending many LTEs increases the odds of placement, increases the likelihood the publication will cover this issue again, and gives you a better chance the next time you write them.
- 10. Don't get discouraged.** We are playing the long game. Writing and placing LTEs requires persistence and dedication; a publication simply cannot pick up every LTE pitched. Instead, rejoice in the successes and share news of LTE placements with other activists. Your good work is being noticed!