



Submitting Letters to the Editor

A Letter-to-the Editor (LTE) is able to reach large audiences. The LTE section of the newspaper is read more frequently than any other. Often perceived as a highly credible display of mainstream community/public sentiment by legislators and other important readers, LTEs, cost nothing except a small investment of time and thought. They can provide:

- An explanation of how your issue relates to other items currently being covered in the news
- A correction of facts after a misleading, inaccurate or biased letter or story
- A chance to respond to other editorials
- A rebuttal to a news or feature story
- A chance to cover the local effects/results of national issues and raise local public awareness of an issue
- A chance to furnish insight on news and issues not being adequately covered by your local newspaper.

Writing an Effective LTE:

- **Find out the newspaper's policy for LTEs.** Call the newspaper and tell them you would like to write an LTE and would like to know to whom you should address the letter, in what form they would like it, and what length restrictions, if any, they have. This may also be listed on the editorial page of the newspaper.
- **Be concise.** Even if the paper you are writing to does not explicitly limit the length of letters it publishes, it will still be to your advantage to be as concise as possible.
- **Stick to one subject.** You are much better off writing a widely read letter about one topic than to write a letter that covers many topics but is not read or, worse, not published, because it is too long.
- **Be timely.** Newspapers will rarely print letters about subjects that are not in the news. Use a recent news event or recently published article as a link for making your letter timely.
- **Do not assume readers will know what you are writing about.** If you are writing about pending legislation, explain what that legislation is, what its effects will be, and when it will be decided. If you are writing in response to an article or editorial, start your letter by saying which article you are responding to and when it appeared.
- **Use your credentials.** If you have personal experience or expertise in the subject area, mention it.
- **Be consistent, but original.** If your organization is planning a letter writing campaign, make sure everyone knows the facts of the situation - nothing could be worse than two letters, ostensibly on the same side of the issue, that contradict each other. At the same time, do not send in "form letters," or letters that are clearly part of a write-in campaign. No newspaper will knowingly allow itself to be part of an organization's propaganda efforts.
- **Concentrate on the local angle.** Newspapers are community-based organs and the Letters-to-Editor column is where they interact with the community most explicitly. Any local angle on the subject you are writing about will increase the impact of your letter and increase its chances for publication.
- **Follow up.** Call to make sure the newspaper has received your letter, and then call a few days later if it has not been printed to find out if it will be printed. If they tell you it is not going to be printed, make sure to ask why so you can incorporate changes into your next attempt.

If you are interested in writing and submitting an OpEd, Alaska Wilderness League's crack communication staff can help you.