

Writing Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

While writing to your elected official about an issue, or calling their office can be an effective way of communicating your position, there are other ways to develop support for your issue. One way is to send a message for the “letters to the editor” section of your local newspaper. Another way is to write an article for the newspaper’s opinion page, called an “op-ed.” Op-eds typically appear on the page facing the newspaper’s own editorials.

Your letter should be considered a conversation not only with fellow readers, but with the newspaper itself. Don’t write a letter out of the blue on a topic that is unfamiliar to the masses. Your letter should be in response to an article or editorial, and your letter should mention this specifically (makes job of 'editing' and fact-checking your letter easier, and thus more likely to get published.)

These guidelines are not meant to be viewed as universal, because all papers have different rules, but they are good protocols to keep in mind.

Do's

- Follow word count rule – every paper publishes what their limit/range is. If it says 150-200 words, don't expect a 275 word letter to be published.
- Make your letter simple, concise and to the point.
- Show the editor you actually read the paper, by including info on previous articles published, and give exact date when possible.
- E-mail is the preferred method of communication.
- Make sure to include personal information, such as name, address, e-mail, etc. Most papers don't include this (aside from name and hometown) on the actual editorial page. Editors ask for this information because they want to make sure you are in readership area.
- Make your letter unique.

Don'ts

- Send a form letter. Editors won't publish them!
- Be afraid to follow up, if after a few days you haven't heard from them. This serves two purposes, ensures your letter was received and enables the editor to ask you any questions he/she might have that are impeding his/her ability to publish.
- Use inflammatory language. Letters won't be discarded because of the opinion but they will be ignored if the opinion is written in a disrespectful manner.
- Send a letter once a week. Instead space your letters out (at least a month, preferably more time) so editors realize you are sincere in your efforts.
- Handwrite your letter. As noted above, e-mail is preferred method. But, if you are sending your letter via traditional mail, make sure it is type-written and ideally double-spaced.