

10 TIPS FOR WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. After you write letters to your members of Congress, sending letters to the editor can achieve other advocacy goals because they:

- reach a large audience.
- are often monitored by elected officials.
- can bring up information not addressed in a news article.
- create an impression of widespread support or opposition to an issue.

1) Keep it short and on one subject. Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper.

2) Use statistics sparingly. They can get confusing and overwhelming very quickly.

3) Make it legible. Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should use a typewriter or computer word processor if your handwriting is difficult to read.

4) A catchy first line is helpful. Instead of "I'm writing to respond to the Star Tribune editorial of August 3rd," try "As a gun owner, the August 3rd editorial left me wondering if Star Tribune editorial writers live in the real world."

5) Make references to the newspaper. Mention an article already printed by the paper. This dramatically increases the chances that your letter will be run. While some papers print general commentary, many will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:

- I was disappointed to see that The Post's May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
- I strongly disagree with (author's name) narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op-Ed," date)
- I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date)

6) Remember your audience. In most cases you're trying to sway the public, not your adversary. Therefore, you should take pains to seem moderate and fair. This doesn't mean you should be bland. But you should write with the average person in mind, and use phrases and arguments that resonate with them. You don't want John Q. Public to be turned off your rhetoric and think, "Well, both sides are extremists" (as often happens with the abortion issue for example).

7) Don't mention criticism that has been leveled against you or your organization. Avoid saying "I am not a crook, thief and a liar as reported in last week's Star Tribune." Better to say "Star Tribune readers wonder who's telling the truth in the controversy over___."

8) Send letters to weekly community newspapers too. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.

9) Be sure to include your contact information. Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.

10) Many papers accept letters by fax and email as well as U.S. mail these days. It never hurts to send your letter via both fax and email. Feel free to follow up with a phone call to make sure the appropriate person got your letter.