

## WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor is one of the easiest ways to get your message across to thousands of readers. Letters pages in newspapers give everyone the opportunity to publish their views.

Politicians carefully monitor local papers. Your local state and federal MP often take these letters as the yardstick of the most important concerns in their constituency.

Here are some tips to help get you started:

### **1. Be timely and topical**

If you are responding to something that appeared in the newspaper, you need to send your letter that very day or, at the latest, the next day. Think about whether there have been any recent related issues in the paper, or on the wider media. If you can tie your letter into a current issue you will have a better chance of getting it published.

### **2. Keep it brief**

To give your letter the best chance of being published, check the [newspaper's guidelines for letters to the editor and keep to the word limit](#). Ideally, keep it under 180 words – less than 150 is best!

### **3. Tailor your letter**

Editors look for particular things in the letters they publish. They also don't want to publish a letter that may have been published elsewhere. Choose a paper and read the letters to the editor section for a couple of weeks to see if you can pick up the style and tone of the letters that get published.

### **4. Type your letter**

Most papers don't demand typed letters, but it certainly helps. Use a standard font in a legible size. Don't use bold or italics because the paper will most likely remove these. Send your letter by fax or email as this is faster than by post and is therefore more likely to result in your letter being published.

### **5. Be logical**

Your letter needs an opening, middle and end. Begin your letter by briefly stating the argument you are making. Then set out the points you want to make and provide any evidence to back up your case. Close your letter by restating your position, making a pithy comment or leaving the reader with something to ponder.

### 6. Refer to the original article

If you are responding to an article or letter previously published in the newspaper, make sure you refer to it at the outset. For articles, refer to their title and the date it was published. For example:

The fact that Indigenous people continue to die 17 years younger than other Australians ('New report highlights life expectancy gap', 25/7) is simply unacceptable.

For letters to the editor, you should refer to the author and the date of its publication. For example:

"Andrew Hewett (Letters, 16/8) makes a strong case for helping our Pacific neighbours adapt to the challenges of climate change."

### 7. Advance the argument

Ask yourself whether you are saying something new, or simply reiterating arguments that have been made before. A letter with nothing to add to a debate is unlikely to be published.

### 8. Don't get personal

Don't attack the editor, the newspaper, or the authors of previous letters. Venomous letters rarely get published. You can express anger in your letter, but try to focus that anger on the issue rather than a particular person and don't write anything that could get you sued!

### 9. Include your contact details

Make sure you write 'letter to the editor' in the subject line of your email and include your name, address and a daytime telephone number with your letter. The paper does not print all of this information but may use it for verification.

### 10. Edit and proofread

Finish your letter and put it aside for an hour. Look at it with fresh eyes. Do the arguments make sense? Is it written logically? If you are worried about your expression, spelling, or grammar, get a friend to look over it for you.

### What next?

Don't give up! If your letter doesn't get published, check out online editions of the newspaper/s. Sometimes letters that didn't make it into the print paper are published online. If you do get published, someone in your group can respond to your letter in response (agreeing or extending your argument), which could advance the topic further and ensure yet more media coverage!