

Writing an Impactful Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor (LTE) for your local newspaper is an effective way to reach large audiences and engage your community and/or your legislators on a pressing conservation issue. You can use them as an opportunity to publicly oppose or support the actions of an elected official or agency; bring attention to a problem or a piece of legislation; urge readers to support your cause; and move news outlets to cover a specific issue.

Published LTEs can have a profound impact on the decisions your legislators make, as they are often perceived as a credible reflection of mainstream community and public sentiment regarding the issue at hand.

HELPFUL TIPS

- **Find out your newspaper's policy for LTEs**—Contact the newspaper and tell them you would like to submit a letter. Ask them to whom you should address the letter, what format you should send it in, and any character limits or other guidelines the newspaper might have.
- **Be concise**—Even if the paper you're writing to doesn't have a character limit, it's always best to keep your letter short, sweet, and to the point.
- **Stick to one subject**—Quality over quantity is key. Writing a widely read letter about a single topic is better than writing a lengthy letter that covers many issues but isn't read.
- **Be timely**—Newspapers will rarely print letters about issues that aren't currently in the news. Use a recently introduced piece of legislation, news event, or published article as a lead for contextualizing your article and to make it as relevant as possible to readers.
- **Don't assume that your audience will know what you're writing about**—If you are covering pending legislation, explain what the bill is, what its impacts will be, and include a timeline for when it will be decided on.
- **Demonstrate expertise**—If you have a background or expertise in the subject area at hand, mention it.
- **Concentrate on the local side**—Newspapers are community-based, so speaking to the local impacts of the issue you're writing about will not only improve your letter by bringing a local, place-based narrative to the table but also increase its likelihood of publication.
- **Follow up**—Check in with the newspaper to confirm the receipt of your letter. If your letter isn't published within a few days, circle back to see if it will be printed and if it isn't, be sure to ask why so you can make changes to your next submission accordingly.

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR LTE

- **Introduction** (25-50 words) — Open with your reason for writing. Are you writing about pending legislation? If so, briefly summarize it.
- **Supporting arguments** (100-150 words) — Include key facts and persuasive arguments to outline your concerns to readers. Strong evidence and a demonstrated expertise in the subject at hand will maximize your LTE's credibility and collective impact.
- **Conclusion** (25-50 words) — Wrap up the piece with a clear, affirming statement or call to action in support of your cause.