

What Makes a Good Letter to the Editor?

How to write an LTE:

1. Keep it short – 150-200 words is ideal. It's also helpful to check out other letters published in the paper you're targeting to see if there is a particular length or format that the paper prefers.
2. Make one point (or at most two) in your letter. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
3. Make your letter timely. If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
4. Make sure you have an action item for people. What should they do with the information you are giving them? What person are you targeting?
5. Find the angle that makes your point interesting or noteworthy.
 - **Timing** - Why is it relevant now
 - **Significance to readership** - Why should they care (know your audience)
 - **Geographic proximity** - how does it affect where you are.
 - **Prominence** - Anybody famous or important that makes it more interesting?
 - **Human Interest** - Give it a human spin (i.e. children, mothers, education)

How to submit an LTE and get it published:

1. Get other people to write and send letters, as well. This will show that many individuals in the community are concerned about the issue. If your letter doesn't get published, perhaps someone else's on the same topic will. Make sure to make them different!
2. Check out the letters page of the newspaper(s) you're targeting. You'll find instructions there about where to send letters to the editor. Submit your letter accordingly.
3. Once you submit your letter, follow up with a phone call one day later. Call the editorial page editor to make sure that it was received. Ask if the paper will print your letter, and make a quick pitch as to why it should.

Note: This follow-up call is essential! By drawing the editorial page editor's attention to your letter, you dramatically increase the odds that it will be published.
4. Monitor the paper for your letter. Collect your clips!

For a sample letter to the editor, read on!

Sample Letter to the Editor

The Washington Post

Young and Green

Wednesday, September 20, 2006; Page A24

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/19/AR2006091901553.html>

In "An Inconvenient Truth About Youth" [op-ed, Sept. 11], Laura Wray and Constance Flanagan contend that the apathy of young people toward conservation will be changed only through government action. Considering the Bush administration's environmental record, we're in a world of trouble if they're correct. Good thing they're wrong.

Far from shirking their responsibility to our planet, young people are leading the way in the fight to stop global warming -- and to open their elders' eyes to the crisis.

Two examples: Students at Western Washington University taxed themselves an extra \$19 in student fees to fund the purchase of renewable energy, and students at Pennsylvania State University -- where Ms. Flanagan teaches and Ms. Wray studies -- gathered more than 4,700 letters asking the administration to embrace the Kyoto Protocol. They have also secured green building standards, a campus wind turbine and a plan to have 22 percent of the school's power come from renewables by 2012.

That is only the tip of the (melting) iceberg. Youth is leading; government should follow.

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