

Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor:

- Keep letters short and to the point, approximately 250 words.
- Adopt the straightforward writing style of journalists; avoid flowery language. Keep writing clear, simple, and accurate. Limit paragraphs to two or three sentences.
- Your letter should be typed, double-spaced, and no more than one page.
- Limit the number of points you make; stay on one subject.
- Be as factual as possible without being dull. Share how many individuals your organization employs and the number of individuals the organization serves.
- Personalize your letter; explain how the issue will affect you, your neighbors, and your community.
- Emphasize the positive. If you criticize, offer a better alternative whenever possible.
- Include your full name, address, and telephone number in your letter. The newspaper may try to reach you before they print the letter to verify that you are the actual writer.
- Most newspapers will not accept letters on behalf of a group; an individual has to sign it.
- Encourage your co-workers, current and past board members, volunteers, friends, and neighbors to write as well.
- Send a copy of your letter to your local legislator and/ or to members of the appropriate legislative committee.
- Your letter stands the best chance of being printed when it responds to something recently printed in that newspaper, such as a news story, column, and/or an editorial. Use a reference to that item as a springboard for making your case.
- Your letter can support and expand on something already in the news, make a point that was omitted, or disagree with and correct misinformation.
- Ask for action; tell readers what you want them to do. This includes your elected representatives at the state and federal levels.
- Proofread your letter carefully for errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Newspapers will usually edit your letter, but your letter is more likely to be published if it is, “clean” to begin with.
- Read your letter to someone for objective input.

Tips for Writing Op-ed Pieces

(Op-eds are longer essays from syndicated columnists, newspaper staff members, or the public):

- Newspapers rarely run anything longer than 700 words on the daily op-ed pages.
- Distinguish your submission with a local angle.
- On rare occasions, newspapers will run op-eds that are direct rebuttals of a news story or another opinion piece. However, in general, do not frame your piece as a point-by-point critique of another piece.
- Try to establish personal contact with the editors who make the decisions about what to publish. Most editors won't mind a call to inquire about their interest in a piece, or a follow-up call after you have sent it. There is a fine line between persistence and harassment. Persistence can pay off, but when editors feel harassed they are less likely to run anything you write.