

How to Write an Effective Letter to the Editor

- Great way to influence your community and legislators.
- Influences the newspaper -- even if not printed.
- It's free.
- Remember these tips: **A-B-C** and **1-2-3**.

A = About. About something in the newspaper.

- Take as your starting point a recent article in the newspaper.
- Best chance of being printed: respond to an editorial, op-ed, or front-page story.

B = Brief.

- Short. Common limits: 150-250 words.
- Check your newspaper's word count policy (see the letters page or website).

C = Concise.

- Get to the point. Just one point please.
- Can the reader to draw a clear conclusion?

1: State the issue

- Refer to the issue as reported in the newspaper. Cite the specific article/letter/editorial's name and date.
- Restate the issue as you understand it. For example:

“Fracking is a dangerous practice that is hurting our community.”

“Fracked gas, contrary to advertising, is dirty and dangerous. It's harming our health.”

2: Build your case

- Make **one** significant point. This could be:
 - Refute erroneous information. *Or...*
 - Provide a better interpretation of the facts. *Or...*
 - Provide a local angle to a larger story. For example, cite the impacts of fracked gas on your community.
 - Then stop.
- Say it in your own voice. Incorporate *your* words, *your* expertise, *your* experience. For example:
 - If you are a health professional, say so.
 - If your health is affected by fracked gas, or someone you love is, or you have patients who are affected, say so.
 - Speak factually, but feel free to express feeling.

3: Call to action.

- What can the reader do? Be specific, concrete, brief.
 - If calling for a legislator or a corporation to take action, include their name. They track the newspapers, so they will see your letter.
 - If your letter is published, send it to the target with a brief cover note. This doubles your impact.
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Additional tips:

- Timeliness is critical – submit by email.
- Mention your local connections. Newspapers love them.
- Sign with your full name. If you're a health professional, include medical credentials (MD, RN, etc.).
- For verification purposes, include your home address, email address and daytime telephone number. These will not be published, but the paper may contact you to confirm you are the author.
- Disclose any personal or financial interest in the subject matter.
- Letters may be subject to editing. Check the word count!
- Letter authors are usually not published more than once every 60 days.
- Your submission must be unique. Do not submit the same letter to any other media.

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Checklist:

- Did you cite a recent article?
- Is your main point clear?
- Did you use your personal voice? Your health expertise?
- Did you cite your local connection?
- Is your opening sentence interesting?
- Did you include a call for action or a policy recommendation?
- Can you write a cool closing line?

Go forth and write LTE's! If you are published, let us know. Send a link to bgottlieb@psr.org.