



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why are letters to the editor important?

Opinion pages, especially letters to the editors, are among the most closely read sections of newspapers (both in print and online). Letters from readers help guide newspaper editors in determining their coverage -- the issues they will cover in news stories and editorials. Additionally, policy-makers and elected officials use these pages to gauge public opinion. A well-written, well-timed letter to the editor can impact and shift public opinion.

How can I write an effective letter?

Do your homework. Be sure to read the letters in your newspaper to get a sense of the length and style of the letters they print. It is important to understand the newspaper's editorial position and coverage in order to submit an effective letter. Frequently, newspapers list their letter submission guidelines on the opinion section of their website.

When writing your letter, make one central point clearly and concisely. Letters should be short, no more than two paragraphs (100-200 words). Start off strong by clearly stating your position in the first sentence. In the first paragraph, state your point and explain why the issue is important to you and the local community. Then support your position with facts. End by restating your point and with a call to action: Vote NO on Proposition 8. Make sure to have someone else proofread your letter.

If you are writing directly in response to an article, be sure to reference the headline and author. It is important to be timely, so submit your letter the same or next day after the article appeared, not a week later. However, your letter must stand on its own. Not all readers will have read the article you are referencing.

Do I have to sign my letter?

Yes. Newspapers do not run anonymous letters. You will be required to include your name, address, email address and phone number. While the newspaper will not print your home address, they will request it for verification purposes.

Will the newspaper edit my letter?

Possibly. Editors may edit your letter for clarity and space. It is possible that an editor will cut part of your letter if it is too long. That is why it is important to send a brief and well-written letter to avoid possible cuts and edits, which you may disagree with.

Will my letter get printed?

By submitting a letter to the editor, you are starting a dialogue in your community. Encourage others to write letters to your newspaper as well. When editors receive multiple letters about an issue, it demonstrates that the community is interested in the topic and editors are likely to print one or two letters. Even if your letter is not the letter selected to appear in the newspaper, the point-of-view and position will. That is the ultimate goal.

After you submit your letter, read the newspaper to see if it appears. If a week passes and the topic hasn't been discussed, feel free to call or email the newspaper's editorial department to follow up.

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