

ROGUE ACTION CENTER

Tools for Organizing: TIPS ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 1) **Keep it short** – Keeping your letter to about five reasonably short sentences will increase the chances of having it published, reduce the chance that it will be edited for length in a way you don't like, and make it more likely to be read if it is published. In any case, it has to be within the paper's word limit.
- 2) **Connect it with news** – Your letter is more likely to get printed if it responds to an article that has recently appeared in the paper or an issue that is in the news.
- 3) **Make it timely** – The sooner you submit your letter after the original article is published, the better chance you have of getting it printed.
- 4) **Follow a basic format**
 - Put a short heading in the style that paper uses for its letters. The editors may put their own heading, but it doesn't hurt to try.
 - Start with an opening sentence that refers to the original article and highlights something that was missed or something you disagree with.
 - State your main point, referring to why you have credibility (“As a nurse for 12 years...”)
 - Say why the public should be concerned and what you think should be done.
 - Sign it and include your address and phone number so the paper can contact you. There generally should be only one or two signers. Papers rarely will print letters with more than two signers.
- 5) **Avoid an excessively negative tone** – Most papers will not print overly harsh attacks on anyone. That includes attacks on the newspaper itself (and remember, you don't want to unnecessarily damage your long-term relationship with them).
- 6) **Connect your point to the public interest** – Use the opportunity not to state a special interest grievance but to show the reader why they would benefit if your position were listened to. Connect your point, for example, to quality services, secure health care, good jobs for the community, or some other public concern.
- 7) **Avoid jargon** that only people in your field or organization are familiar with.
- 8) **Show the letter to a few people not involved in your group** to see if you have *used the right language and tone and appealed to the broader public interest.*