

9 TIPS

rethink

Writing & Placing Letters to the Editor

- 1 Include the title of the original article.** Always reference the article you are responding to in the first sentence of your letter and in the body of your text. Some quick examples include:
 - *The Times* May 18 editorial, "Racial Profiling Works," omitted some key facts.
 - I strongly agree with [author's name]'s view on the need to reform public school policies on bullying.
 - Congressman Doe's efforts to establish new TSA procedures ["Title of Article," date] will be a blow to our civil liberties.
- 2 Keep it brief.** Different publications prefer different lengths, but the maximum length accepted is usually no more than 200 words. Check previous LTE's on the publication's website for guidance.
- 3 Respond quickly.** Try to write and submit your LTE the same day that the original story appeared. Most outlets have a 24-hour window in which you have a realistic expectation of being published.
- 4 Focus on one point.** Over-complicated letters don't run. Focus on one issue or point and aim for straightforward and pithy. If there are multiple points you wish to respond to in an article, write one LTE to address each and recruit colleagues to sign them.
- 5 Personalize your message.** Local editors receive dozens of letters each day; national editors receive hundreds. If you really want your letter to stand out, make sure it is not copied word-for-word from a form letter. If you have a personal story that shows how the issue affects you and/or your family, share it—briefly.
- 6 Know your audience.** Are you writing to a local newspaper? If so, try to touch on issues specific to that state's and/or community's readership. If you're writing to a newspaper or magazine with a national readership, focus on issues of national importance, unless the specific article you are referring to is about a local event.
- 7 Be polite—in what you write and in your approach.** You can be critical of the paper, author, or information, but it must be written in a civil tone. Papers will never publish insulting letters. When sending the letter, personalize the approach: take the time to find the name of the editor and make it clear you're receptive to edits or revisions.
- 8 Proofread.** Any typo or grammatical error in a letter diminishes its chances of being published. Always double-check your letter for errors and have a colleague review it before submitting.
- 9 Include your contact information.** When you send your letter to the editor, you must include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Anonymous letters are not as credible as signed letters and most newspapers will not publish them. Your address is important because papers prefer to print letters from local readers. Include your phone number because most newspapers will not run a letter without verifying its authorship.

