



TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS to the EDITOR

1. **Length:** Always check with the editor or read the editorial page for word limits. Many daily newspapers limit letters to 250-350 words. Some weeklies have no limits. If you exceed the limit, your letter will be edited and you could lose your key point.
2. **Message:** Don't ramble. Start with the main point you want to make. Use subsequent paragraphs to add examples or supporting evidence.
3. **Style:** Use simple words, short sentences and paragraphs. Avoid three and four syllable words. Limit sentences to 15-20 words max. Paragraph after two sentences.
4. **Vocabulary:** Don't use words like 'utilize' or 'employ' when you really mean use. Write to the level of the average eighth grader. A good example of this type of writing is found on the front page of the *USA Today*.
5. **Address:** Address your letter "To the Editor"—you don't need a name for the inside address.
6. **Signature/Identity:** You MUST sign your letter, then type or print your name. This authenticates it.
7. **Caution:** Don't commit libel—that is, don't call people names or accuse them of illegal acts, not matter how angry you are about something. Your letter probably won't get printed if you make false allegations, libel someone or use derogatory words. However, misspellings are often printed exactly as you wrote them with the term (sic) behind the misspelled word. (That's Latin for "as is").
8. **Purpose:** If your letter-to-the-editor exceeds 500 words, you probably should consider submitting it as an "Op-Ed" piece, develop it more and add a couple of additional points. Op-Eds can be limited to 700 words, but frequently exceed that.