

Tips for a Good Letter to the Editor

Why Are Letters to the Editor Important?

1. If published, it indicates to the public that the topic is important.
2. Legislators use them as a guide to what is important in their community.

Is My Issue Newsworthy?

The closer to the top of this list, the more likely your letter is to be published.

MOST LIKELY TO BE PUBLISHED:



Editorials & front page news
Staff-written columns (U-T's staff)
Locally written op-eds
Syndicated columnist
Inside news stories
Editorial cartoons

LEAST LIKELY TO BE PUBLISHED:

Other letters to the editor

Improving Your Letters:

- It's best to refer to a story or opinion in the publication within 2-3 days of that article's publication.
- Make one key point with a strong opening statement. Put the title of the article in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Don't waste your time with "I'm writing about..."
- Keep it short, well within the rules (U-T limits it to 150 words).
- Reference a specific story or specific line in the story. A compliment to the story's author or the newspaper helps, too.
- Don't repeat opponents' messages!
- Use your personal experience and your own voice.
- Include a call to action/next step (ask for a specific action).
- Use rhetorical devices like repetition, a play on words or closing the circle from the letter's beginning
- Avoid insults, name-calling, and sarcasm. You can express anger, but don't rant.
- Verify your facts. Don't exaggerate.
- Use metaphors and wit, but be respectful
- Do **NOT** reference Indivisible, Hillcrest Indivisible or "progressive groups"
- Use your own words--no platitudes
- If you are trying to influence a legislator, use their name. (This makes it more likely they will see it.)
- Remove non-essential words like "I think," "sort of," "seemed to," "begin to," "at the end of the day."
- Cut out most adverbs and adjectives.
- Use strong, active verbs.
- Don't use ALL CAPS or more than one exclamation mark!!!
- Use kitchen table language, not jargon. Avoid acronyms. Do it this way: Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
- Read your letter out loud. Edit it until it sounds like you're talking. Have someone else read it and ask what message they got.
- If published, share it on social media.

- If not published, don't get discouraged. Most aren't, but all letters are read and have some influence on the selection of other letters. Keep trying.

From the Indivisible Website-- Additional Comments on Letters to the Editor:

Why Your Legislator Cares About Letters To The Editor

The humble

"Letter to the Editor" has stayed influential in politics even as social media platforms have come and (some) gone. Here are a couple of reasons why:

- Your legislator will likely see your letter in the morning "clips." Every morning, legislators and their staffs start their day reading "the clips," an email with links to all of the stories that mention the legislator by name. In most offices, these include Letters to the Editor, and a letter that's about a legislator will definitely be noticed and discussed.
- Newspaper editors see your letter, and your legislator cares what they think. Editorial boards are important local institutions for your legislator. They interview and endorse candidates during campaign season, and their opinions carry lots of weight all through the year.
- Seniors see your letter, and your legislator cares what they think. Seniors are seen as one of the big audiences for letters to the editor. They also vote in big numbers, something legislators are also very aware of.

Writing Your Letter

- Note that many newspapers will require that letter writers submit contact information with their letter. Phone numbers won't be published. This is just to verify your identity.
- **Focus on one topic.**
- Be clear and concise.
- Be yourself. You don't need to talk like an academic or a policy expert. Remember, you're a smart, passionate constituent who's paying attention, one who other constituents might identify with—and that's the most powerful thing you can be.

What should go into a letter to the editor?

- You'll notice that many good letters to the editor sound similar to the call scripts Indivisible sends out: a couple of points, a statistic, and a personal note.
- Here are some other things you can recycle:
 - Shared a story at an empty chair town hall? Turn it into a letter to the editor!
 - Wrote a postcard at a postcard party? Turn it into a letter to the editor!
 - Wrote a thank you note on a poster? Turn it into a letter to the editor!
 - Wrote a message to your legislator on Facebook? Turn it into a letter to the editor!

Here are some ways to really get under your legislator's skin:

Many of us who worked for a Member of Congress remember at least once that a Letter to the Editor really bugged our boss and they wouldn't let it go. Here are some of the ways to write that letter!

- **Question their "brand."** Go to the "Biography" page on your legislator's websites to see how they describe themselves. Then play on that.
 - "Congresswoman Jones prides herself on being an independent voice that's above the fray in Washington. But so far this year, she's been a rubber stamp across the board..."
 - "Congresswoman Jones ran for office as a fiscally-responsible conservative. That's why it's ironic that she's considering voting for this bill, which ____."

- **Know their record.** Search around on the “issue” pages of your Legislator’s website to learn what they’ve said in the past on an issue.
 - “Congresswoman Jones has said that she would only vote for a bill that did _____. This bill does the exact opposite: it _____.”
 - “When Congresswoman Jones was running for office, she pledged to _____. Unfortunately, it looks like she’s going to be falling in lock-step with her party and voting to _____.”
- **Call them out-of-touch with the district.**
 - “Does Congresswoman Jones think that (residents) are all _____? What she doesn't seem to realize is that we are also _____. Her decision to _____ was extremely out-of-touch.”
 - “Congresswoman Jones must be behind the times if she thinks people from _____ are still going to let their Representative in Congress say that _____ ...”
- **Show them you have a long memory.** Talk about an issue that’s not in the headlines to show your Legislator you’re still paying attention.
 - i. “This Fourth of July, I am still shocked remembering Congresswoman Jones’s un-American comments on the Muslim ban, and I’m disappointed she has never apologized.”
 - ii. “Congress may not be in session, but families around the state are still holding their breath to see what will happen with _____ bill.”
- **Put your letter in local terms... and put your Legislator on the spot.**
 - “My family has always gone to _____ Hospital. I’m really concerned about what would happen to it under the new bill Congresswoman Jones is considering.”
 - “With this spring’s flooding, (Town) is already feeling the effects of extreme weather. It’s amazing that Congresswoman Jones still raises any doubts about the science behind climate change.”
- **Defy stereotypes.** Many papers have frequent letter-writers who are very liberal or very conservative. Those writers can be easy to brush off. So stress any ways that you’re different.
 - “While I may not always agree with Congresswoman Jones, I have always admired her commitment to making herself accessible to constituents all around the district. That’s why I’m so disappointed that _____.”
 - “I’ve supported candidates from both parties in the past. But Congresswoman Jones has really lost my respect with her steady shift towards _____.”

Thanks to Indivisible for sharing this information