



Letters to the Editor

Letters to the press are scary (they might print them!) but necessary. If you don't tell the community how policies are impacting your schools—they won't know! And the local media is the best way to get them "in the loop."

The key to writing effective letters is to be timely and brief. Keep an eye on what's happening at the legislature and what's being reported in the media, and write about an issue when it's hot. Focus on just one issue at a time and spread the effort around by recruiting a team of people willing to write letters about your key issues.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Here are some tips to improve your chances of getting printed:

1. **Request submission guidelines and follow them.** Each media outlet has different guidelines for letters to the editor. Some have community reporter programs and opinion pages. The submission guidelines vary for each of these. Many papers post their guidelines and submission instructions on their Web sites. The Minnesota Newspapers Directory is a good resource for basic contact information and Web links. If you don't find the information you're looking for, call the newspaper and ask.
2. **Keep the letter short!** The Star Tribune and the Pioneer Press say they prefer 250 words or less. The key word here is less. A good 100-word letter is far more likely to be printed than a good 200-word one. A good 50-75 word letter is even better.
3. **Keep it simple.** Stick to a single key point. You can react to an earlier article, an op-ed piece, an earlier letter to the editor, published remarks of various officials, or you can tell a personal story about how your school is serving your children.
4. **Mention your perspective on the issue.** "As a mother of two, ..."
5. **Write in everyday language.** Have fun. Be passionate, droll, analytical, funny, whatever fits your personality. Remember, it's not a college term-paper. You're simply talking to your neighbors.
6. **Check and double check all facts, figures and quotations.** If you include statistics, refer to a source in a footnote. It won't be published, but the staff may use it to check your numbers.
7. **Send your letter through the mail, by fax or as a regular e-mail, but NOT as an e-mail attachment.** Newspapers don't like to open attachments because they worry about viruses invading their computers.
8. **Include your name, address and phone number**—so editors can call you if they need to. (They usually won't call, nor will they print your phone number or address. They'll just use your name and your city.)
9. **Send letters to newspapers, big and small.** The daily papers have big readerships, but don't forget your weekly community newspapers too. They love to hear from readers and unlike the dailies, they don't get as much mail. If you belong to a local e-mail list or Web-based discussion group, post your letter there too.
10. **Remember your opinions do matter.** Sharing your point of view encourages other citizens to do the same, brings ordinary people into the policy debates and strengthens our democracy. Don't be discouraged if your first efforts aren't published. Keep writing. Write about multiple issues and send your letters to several papers. Encourage your friends to write.

Submission Guidelines

Star Tribune – www.startribunecompany.com/143

Pioneer Press – www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/7532285.htm