

Use letters to the editor and editorials to **reinforce** your message

The editorial page can be a powerful tool to get your message out exactly as you want it heard.

Submitting editorial columns

Editorial, or opinion, columns are bylined by the writer and generally address a single topic. Often this type of column is used to communicate details about an issue that might not be included in a regular news story. Editorial columns can also be used to rebut or clarify an issue.

Carefully target the newspaper where you initially submit your editorial. Some papers want the exclusive to your column and will not publish one that has been sent en masse to all papers in the state. It is often helpful to contact the editorial page editor before submitting a column to gauge that paper's interest in running it. Identify the newspaper where you have the best opportunity of having it published, then send it to the others. Most newspapers like columns to run between 500 and 1000 words.

Writing letters to the editor

Letters to the editor can be valuable tools to reinforce public interest in an issue.

If a resident has something nice to say about a city service or program, encourage her to put it in a letter to the editor. If you want to thank a community organization for a job well done on a project, a letter to the editor is a good way to do it. Letters should run no more than 200 words in most papers (The State newspaper limits letters to 200 words) and must be submitted by mail or e-mail with a name, address and phone number included. In general, papers will not run anonymous letters.

Framing your argument for letters or editorials

- Try to reduce your point to a single opening sentence.
- Make sure the sentence passes the “WOW test” or “HMMMM test.” Avoid starting your letter or editorial with “I am writing about...”
- Prepare to defend any point worth making. Gather your best three or four supporting arguments and make each one the point of a paragraph. Use active voice (“He bought the car” not “The car was bought.”).
- Raise your opponents’ best arguments and challenge them with facts that disprove their arguments, any potential ironies, etc.
- Ask yourself: What is the minimum background information a reader absolutely has to have to grasp this point? Write two paragraphs (at the most) to summarize this information.
- Does your letter or editorial raise questions, surprise or intrigue? Does it make the reader want to go beyond the first paragraph?
- Draft about 500 - 1000 words (max). All papers have a maximum word limit for letters and editorials.
- Do not forget to include your name, title and affiliation at the conclusion of the piece.
- Be patient! It could take weeks for the letter or column to run. Continuously calling the staff of the editorial page may not help and may actually hurt your chances of it making the paper