

Tips for getting your Letter to the Editor published

When there's an environmental issue in the news, a Letter to the Editor (LTE) in your local newspaper can be an excellent way to spread the Sierra Club's conservation message. Here are some tips for getting your LTE published, courtesy of Jim Dougherty of the D.C. Chapter of the Sierra Club.

1. Use seven sentences, plus-or-minus one.
2. Sentence one should identify an error or omission in a recent (fish-fresh) op-ed or article in that publication. This is key.
Editors at reputable publications like to run good criticism, even if it stings. They also like to sharpen the work of the reporting staff (situated on the other side of the "Chinese wall" separating editorial and reporting) by highlighting errors and omissions in the daily reportage.
3. Once you have a decent seven-sentence draft, spend a couple of hours tuning phrases. (For example, a first draft reading "for years, developers have been considering Poplar Point" was revised to read: "Since 2005, the power players that lead DC's sports-governmental-complex have been pointing their long knives at Poplar Point."). Invite others to hone your draft (within hours).
4. Consider making one of the other sentences interrogative, but avoid cuteness (e.g., "is this any way to run a government?").
5. Provide all of your contact information as well as your Sierra Club affiliation (officer, member etc.).
Once you've submitted the LTE:
6. Send it to the beat reporter, if applicable, as soon as you submit it to the Editorial Board. This is more likely to get you into future stories than a simple email to the reporter.
7. If your letter runs, redistribute it widely and quickly via social media and listservs. No one minds an email saying "my LTE ran today!" This inspires others, and can generate buzz on blogs and the like.
8. Don't be discouraged. Big publications reject perhaps 97% of all submissions, small ones perhaps 90%.