**What is a Letter to the Editor?**

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are usually written in direct response to an article, editorial, op-ed, or column that has been published. They can also be a reaction to or notification of a newsworthy event. They are published on the editorial page, one of the most-read pages in the publication, making them an effective way to reach a large audience in the community. Due to strict space limitations in newspapers, not all letters are published, but the more LTEs the publication receives on a certain topic, the more likely they are to run at least one LTE on the topic. LTEs are also more likely to get published than an op-ed and can be published in a quicker turnaround than an op-ed.

**When to Write an LTE**

* Your topic has been mentioned in the publication recently
* You have just one or two points that can be succinctly stated
* You can write a response to the topic mentioned in the publication within one to two days

**How to Write an LTE**

Follow the Publication’s Rules — Each publication will be slightly different so check out their website to see what requirements they have for LTEs. Many publications limit pieces to 250 words or less.

Know Your Goal & Audience — If you want action, ask for it. If you want change, demand it. Present clear solutions to the problems you are identifying.

Hook the Reader — Start with something compelling and unique to hook the reader. Share a story to draw in the reader and don’t be afraid to use the first person.

Stay Focused — LTEs don’t allow for a lot of space; therefore, it’s critical to make sure you stay focused on the one thing you want your readers to know. Don’t try to fit too much into your piece or the purpose and goal of the LTE will become lost.

Use Everyday Language — Don’t limit your audience by using complex language and acronyms, you want to draw in a wide audience. Aim for writing at an 8th grade level or below.

Assume Nothing — Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue. Also include any relevant credentials that prove you are informed about your topic.

Maintain Composure — It is okay to express outrage, but it should be kept under control. Never personally attack someone. Instead, focus on criticizing specific policies or ideas and propose a better alternative.

Stay Relevant — Make sure you are writing about something timely and relevant. When responding to a recent article, make sure to mention the specific article you are writing in response to.

Find a Local Angle — Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how budget cuts or environmental policies will affect this particular readership.

Keep it “You”— Authenticity is the name of the game. Express your opinion succinctly and support your points but remember to make it your own. Telling your personal story is the most powerful tool in advocacy -- don’t hold back! Include personal details (hometown, professional title) to better drive home your arguments.

Be factual — And highlight aspects of the issue that haven’t been previously addressed.

Link your Sources — Whenever you state a fact be sure to hyperlink your text with your source to backup the information that you’re sharing.

Avoid Duplicate Letters — Do not send the same letter to two papers. Most major papers will only print letters that are exclusive to that paper.

Send a Polished Piece — Be sure to send your LTE as an attached Word document, double spaced, with a title. Also make sure to include your name, title or position (if applicable), email, phone number, and address.

Say “Thank You” — Once your piece is published, be sure to reach out to the publication thanking them for including your piece.

Spread the Word — Share your piece on social media, send it to your legislator, or to any relevant decision makers.

**Writing an LTE on Behalf of Sierra Club Maine**

We love to have volunteers write LTEs on behalf of our chapter! We simply ask that you identify yourself individually in addition to our chapter name such as “volunteer, Sierra Club Maine” and submit your LTE with at least 24 hours notice (Monday through Friday) to [Maine.Chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:Maine.Chapter@sierraclub.org) to be reviewed prior to submitting.

**Have any questions? Don’t hesitate to reach out to us at** [**maine.chapter@sierraclub.org**](mailto:maine.chapter@sierraclub.org)**.**