



# TOOLS FOR THE CITIZEN ACTIVIST

## Letters To The Editor

A letter to the editor enables you to inform large audiences about important issues. In fact, according to several surveys, the letters to the editor section of the newspaper is read more frequently than any other. Letters to the editor are often perceived as a display of public sentiment by legislators and other important readers. Best of all, letters to the editor, in addition to all of the influence they carry in a newspaper, cost nothing except a small investment of time and thought. Letters to the editor are a very versatile and effective format.

### They Allow:

- for an explanation of how your issue relates to other items currently being covered in the news
- for a correction of facts after a misleading, inaccurate or biased letter or story
- for a chance to respond to other editorials
- for a rebuttal to a news or feature story
- for a chance to cover the local effects/results of national issues and raise local public awareness of an issue(s)
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, letters to the editor provide for a chance to furnish insight on news and issues not being adequately covered by your local newspaper.

Letters should be brief, clear, and to the point. Approximately one page, or about two to three short paragraphs (max. 250 words) should be all that is needed to adequately address the issue. Shorter letters are much more likely to be printed than long ones due to newspaper space requirements. Get to your main point quickly since editors are likely to start deleting from the end. Short, direct sentences are best. Avoid using too many numbers. Keep it simple!

### Be Sure To:

- know what you want to say, then say it plainly so people can understand
- keep it positive
- localize and personalize your story in order to make it relate more closely with the people with whom you are trying to connect
- type or handwrite clearly and be sure to include your address
- make sure facts and figures are correct
- keep trying if a letter isn't printed immediately
- stagger letters a few days apart if writing within a group in order to maintain public awareness and interest over a longer period of time