



Some tips on getting letters to the editor published

Things To Do:

§ Pay attention to letters and comments by others. Note effective and ineffective approaches (especially letters that effectively argue a position you oppose), style, length, etc. This will help you improve your own letter.

§ Speak in the language and to the literacy level of that publication's readers – which is generally middle to high school. Some writers think they're clever showing off their sesquipedalianism.

§ Respond directly either to breaking news or an article or commentary previously published. Reference the article in the style and format the paper uses. (It shows you read the paper.) A typical format is: *Re "Talking With the Taxman," (Minnesota, Jan. 13). Your report neglected...*

§ Focus on one important point (don't try to address separate issues in one letter). Be sure to follow the guidelines and word count limit of the target publication (up to 250 words is typical for local and regional papers, but many larger newspapers are limited to 150 or so).

§ Maximize your chance of being published by removing every non-essential word. For example, don't say, "I think..." It's obvious. This also minimizes the chance of editors changing the letter.

§ Use verified facts. Take the time to check original sources rather than repeating "fact" cited in another media outlet. Providing web links shows you did some research and are providing documentation, even if the publication doesn't use them.

§ For most letters, you want to create one of three primary scenarios:

- A. Promote a person or position by challenging status quo or public criticism.
- B. Challenge a statement made by someone.
- C. Provide a practical solution to a current situation.

§ Create immediacy by indicating how readers will be affected by the issue you address when possible. Try to balance criticism with a potential positive. *Why not hire students instead...*

§ Point people to a source for more information or to engage in action whenever practical.

§ If possible, use the newspaper's online form for submitting a letter to the editor. Otherwise, email your letter in the body of the email (don't send unsolicited attachments) and put "Letter re: [your topic or article name]" in the subject line.

§ It is best to send a letter to a specific newspaper, following their style, and not broadcast send them to all the media. If you wish to submit to more than one publication, make at least some effort to re-write part of it. Media hate to look like they copied something from other media

§ Use respectful titles. *Pres. Donald Trump... U.S. Representative Erik Paulson...*

§ Include your address and daytime phone number for verification.

§ If the publication publishes an online version of your letter, use social media to promote your own letter. Modern media track "clicks" very carefully and the more clicks your letter gets the more likely the newspaper will print more letters like it.

Things to Avoid:

§ Don't overstate or exaggerate your points. One overstatement makes following points suspect.

§ Don't use "insult words" regarding your opponents. Stupid, useless, moron. It's just name-calling.



§ Avoid vague references to complicated things. Don't say it's unconstitutional. Instead find the actual court case where the right was upheld. "In Coke vs. Pepsi, the U.S. Supreme Court..."

§ Avoid jargon or acronyms (spell out any name the first time you use it, followed by the acronym in parentheses).

§ Never use all capital letters or bold text to emphasize a word. It will rarely be printed that way and may prevent your letter from being considered. You may italicize one or two words, but most papers will print it in plain text regardless — words must speak for themselves.

This is modified by Jeremy Powers from the online source

http://reclaimdemocracy.org/effective_letters_editor/

To the editor:

A couple of weeks ago, Sen. Michelle Bachman denied the anti-gay marriage amendment was a divisive issue. In fact, she said, it was an issue that brought Minnesotans together. Then, by her own admission, her family, which includes a lesbian stepsister, was divided on the issue. And now more relatives are writing letters to the editor critical of her and her stance. If her family is polarized on this issue – and she is the chief author of it in the Senate – how can it be anything but even more polarizing to the state as a whole?

To the editor:

I read with incredulity Katherine Kersten's misbegotten use of Hester Prynne as an example of a character from classic literature to explain why today's teens should not replace classic literature in favor of modern books (Opinion Exchange, Sept. 20 [2009]). The "Scarlet Letter," "Of Mice and Men" and "Inherit the Wind" were the books of my adolescence that cemented my progressive attitudes. What I, and most people, learned from "The Scarlet Letter" was that petty, archaic -- read conservative -- morals bankrupted the little village in the story. But because of being cast out, Hester had a better understanding of the human psyche than did her closed-minded neighbors who took Puritan teachings as rote. It taught us that lies were not OK, even if they remained hidden and we somehow tried to justify them. We understood double standards are not fair. In the end, we realized socially outcast Hester was the best person in her village.

Based on her previous columns, Kersten would have been among the first to snub Hester and Pearl as not meeting her narrow concept of morality. Kersten would have defended the dishonest Dimmesdale as she regularly does questionable leaders of churches. I doubt even the 18th-century Kersten would have appreciated the charitable work Hester did, despite her musings on how private charity, not government, should provide for the under privileged.

By all means, people, have your children struggle through the brusque language of "The Scarlet Letter" and let them learn that if it weren't for political progressives pushing against the ancient so-called morals of our ancestors, most of us would still have slavery, bow to kings, church demagoguery would rule every minute of our lives and we would all work seven days a week for the very rich to eke out a bare, meaningless existence.

To the editor:

I find it ironic that Gov. Tim Pawlenty is telling the legislature "get back to work," when it has been the governor's own unwillingness to compromise that has created this year's special session. Apparently, Gov. "Stepping Stone" believes that Minnesotans must hold fast to his vision of "a government of the slogan, by the slogan and for the slogan" regardless whatever battlefields it creates.



To the editor:

Am I the only one who sees the irony in forcing children to recite the Pledge of Allegiance? You can make anyone recite it, but recitation is not a pledge. It is ridiculous to force people to pledge their allegiance to anything, but especially to the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

If our elected officials spent less time mocking the government of which they are a part, denigrating public institutions such as our schools, and instead respected each other and sought the proverbial "liberty and justice for all," we wouldn't have to force anyone to pledge their allegiance. People would do it happily and voluntarily, which is the only real way to do it.