

What you can do ...

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR



So Others Might Eat

A published letter to the editor of a newspaper will get your message out to a large number of people—and at no cost to you. The downside is that relatively few letters get published. You can maximize your chances by following the steps below.

- **Follow the newspaper's policy for letters to the editor.** Most newspapers have policies for letters they will print. These commonly include maximum length, full identification of the writer and a requirement that the letter be submitted only to that particular newspaper. You can find the newspaper's policy in its editorial section or the corresponding section of its website. The policy will also tell you where to send your letter.
- **Peg your message to a recent news article, editorial or op-ed the newspaper has published.** Even if the newspaper does not require this (and some do), you will increase your chances of publication by introducing your message as a response to something the newspaper has published.
- **Be timely.** Write your letter directly after the piece you are responding to appears—within a day or two if possible. Check the newspaper's online site to see if you can e-mail your letter.
- **Keep it short and simple.** Try to stay under the maximum length the newspaper specifies. Address only one issue and make only one or two major points about it. Back up your points with a few well-chosen facts—and be sure they're accurate because newspapers check.
- **Make it personal.** Frame your position in terms of your personal experience or the experience of other individuals. Focus on how the issue hurts or helps people in your community. This is what will make your letter an original contribution to the debate.
- **Include your "credentials."** Relate your views to your on-the-job experience or volunteer work, if possible. This will add credibility to your message. If you are speaking for an organization, identify it and your role in the signature block at the end of your letter.
- **Be polite.** Abusive language is a sure way to wind up in the don't-publish pile. So avoid accusations and name-calling, even if you're outraged by the piece you're responding to.
- **Don't give up.** If your letter is not published, consider posting it as an online comment to an op-ed or a newspaper reporter's blog. Alternatively, you can look for an opportunity to update and resubmit it—either to the same newspaper or to another one.