

Advocacy Toolkit

10 Steps for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor prove a valuable and visible forum for you to express your perspective on homelessness. Letters to the editor are among the best-read parts of the paper and a great way for your legislator to know what his or her community is thinking.

1. **Brevity.** Letters to the editor should be short and punchy.
2. **Strength in numbers.** Try to generate several letters from your friends and colleagues. The number of letters will signal the importance of the issue and increase the likelihood of the letters being printed.
3. **Keep your objective in mind.** It can be tempting to respond in anger; just be sure you know what your purpose is. For example, instead of saying the service cuts in your community make you mad, say: *I expect my City Councilman, County Commissioner, legislator, Representative, etc., to fight to keep our community intact.*
4. **Respond quickly.** If you see something in the media you want to respond to, try to send your letter by email or fax by the next day at the latest.
5. **Up front.** Mention your reason for writing in the first sentence. If you are commenting on an issue, be as specific as you can.
6. **To the point.** Limit the content of your letter to one or two key points. A letter to the editor offers the chance for a concise statement on a subject, not an in-depth analysis. Keep on the one message you want readers to get from your letter.
7. **Take a strong position.** Newspapers look for fresh facts, honest statements of opinion and creative slants on the news. Include a call to action.
8. **Edit for length.** Keep your letter to no more than three paragraphs. Aim for about 200 words or less. The more direct and simple your letter is, the more likely it will be published.
9. **Follow guidelines.** Start your letter with “Dear Editor”. Also, include your name, address and phone number so an editor can call you to verify that you wrote the letter. The newspaper will only publish your city, not your home address.
10. **Deliver.** Make sure your letters get into the right hands. Call your paper and ask for the name and contact information of the person to whom you should send the letter.