

Eight tips for writing successful “Letters to the Editor”

1. Newspapers typically receive dozens of letters each day (some of the larger newspapers can receive hundreds). Accordingly, in order to get yours published, it has to stand out in some way – try to make it unique (either through argumentation or by relating a relevant personal experience). If you’re contributing to an ongoing debate, try not to repeat what’s already been said.
2. Newspapers tend to print letters that are relevant to current events. Unless your letter relates to something that *should be made* “newsworthy” (i.e. your friend was subject to police abuse after being caught with a joint), try to submit your opinions on the marijuana prohibition at a time when it’s particularly topical.
3. Try to keep your letter short. Most newspapers impose limits of 250-300 words – but that doesn’t mean you can’t write it shorter. If you take time to craft your letter, and try to weed out anything that isn’t completely necessary, your writing will be more effective – and you’ll stand a better chance of getting published.
4. Cut the intro and conclusion. Writing for this particular format necessitates that you get straight to the point.
5. If your letter is in response to a news story or another letter, you should refer to the headline and date that the original item was published.
6. Avoid all personal attacks. If there’s a particular individual involved in the marijuana prohibition that deserves to be berated, limit your argument to their position – not their person.
7. Don’t forget the smaller newspapers. While it may be prestigious to get your letter into a large national paper, local papers can be just as (and sometimes even more) effective as a forum for your opinion.
8. Always identify yourself in your letter. Most newspapers won’t publish anonymous letters. Write down your last and first name (or, at least your first initial), along with the name of your local municipality. These pieces of information will almost always get published. Many newspapers also require that you provide them with contact information – which definitely *doesn’t* get published. So, don’t forget to provide your telephone number and home address.