

## **Fact Sheet**

### **How to Write to the Newspapers (and be Printed)**

The web and the internet may be providing more of our news today, but writing a letter to the newspaper is often still the best way of getting your own voice heard. A letter to the Editor of your local newspaper or even a metropolitan daily can tell people about an issue that needs more attention, suggest a solution that hasn't been covered in the news or allow you to ask the people in power to consider what they are doing.

Newspapers receive far more letters to the Editor than they publish. Pay attention to the letters that do get published. How long are they? Are they written in a particular style? Are they from individuals or from people representing local organisations? Do they deal with local or national issues?

Pick the subject of your letter with care. Letters have to be topical and relevant to current debate in that newspaper. If you are responding to a previous letter or an article that appeared in the newspaper, then send your letter within 24 hours if possible. Emailing a letter is the quickest and most reliable method, but fax is still acceptable and fast. If sending your letter by email just cut and paste the text into the body of the email, never send attachments. Be aware that if a newspaper receives a lot of mail on one issue, it will only print the best of the representative letters – so there's a big incentive to make your letter stand out if you want to get published.

As well as being topical, what's the best kind of letter to the Editor? Keep it short –150 words or less – and keep it positive and constructive. Don't be too technical and keep it simple. Provide a solution to the problem you are writing about because it pushes the debate further along.

Follow the points below that give advice on how to write a letter that makes an impact.

Give your address and contact details. No newspaper will print an anonymous letter or a letter that they cannot validate as coming from the apparent writer.

1. If referring to a previously published letter or article, state the newspaper title, the date of publication, the author and what their letter/article was about. By doing this, everyone knows exactly what the context of your letter is before you start.
2. State your issue clearly in the first paragraph. New facts, figures or arguments will increase your chance of getting in.
3. Expand on the issue and don't be afraid to use colourful images. You want to get readers interested.
4. Once you've stated the problem and got people interested, provide a solution. Even if you are opposing someone's actions, be positive about what they could achieve.
5. Finish off with a punchy summary and sign off statement that should leave readers nodding their heads in agreement.

Finally, don't be disappointed if your letter isn't published. Keep trying. Modern newspapers often have an online letters page on their websites. It's easier to be published online because there are no space constraints. The Courier-Mail takes the best online contributions and prints them in the letters to the Editor, which proves that getting into print still counts.