



How to Communicate with Reporters

The following tips are intended for the more confident advocate. CDF will gladly work with any individuals or groups wanting to submit a Letter or Op-Ed to the newspaper in support of children.

There are 101 excuses for not writing or calling the media when you see unfair, biased or inaccurate news coverage: "I don't know enough"; "I'm too busy"; "My computer crashed."

Communicating with journalists makes a difference. It does not have to be perfect; not all letters to journalists need to be for publication. Even a one-sentence, handwritten or email note to a reporter can be helpful. If you take the time to type a substantive letter, send copies of it to two or three places within the media outlet-perhaps to the reporter, his or her editor, as well as to the letters-to-the-editor department.

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Newspaper "letters to the editor" are usually short comments that make one simple point. They are usually a response to something that has appeared in the op ed page, an editorial, or in a news story. Regardless, if you send a letter to the editor, remember most newspapers get many more letters than they can print and your letter on a topic may help to bump others up. Because newspaper space is usually at a premium, keep it short. Check the guidelines for word count (usually 150-200 words) and how to submit (usually email like viewpoints@chron.com).

Useful Tips:

- **Identify your target publications and programs.**
- **Research the letters policy for each venue on for your target list.**
- **Reference a recent print or broadcast article.** Write your letter as a direct response to recent coverage, building on the focus presented or emphasizing how your perspective wasn't presented (and presenting it clearly).
- **Respond as quickly as you can.**
- **Hone your opinion letter writing style, before you're on deadline to submit it.**
- **Be concise.** Include a maximum of 150-200 words.
- **State your point early and clearly.** Use the inverted pyramid scheme, leading with (and maintaining focus on) your most important point.
- **Include your contact information.** Your contact information is a prerequisite for most publications to print your letter. Include your full name, address, phone number and email.
- **Don'ts**
 - Don't write too often. Once every three months is as often as you should write.
 - Avoid being abusive or strident.
- **Follow up.** Make a follow-up phone call to the editor in question to make sure your letter has been received.

How to Write an Op-Ed

Op-eds are longer than letters to the editor, and there is more competition for space. Check with the paper for length requirements (usually 600-800 words) and who to send to (usually an email like: outlook@chron.com).

Try to write on a controversial issue being covered at that time. If you can use a professional title that suggests authority, do so. If you work for an organization, get permission to sign the op-ed as a representative of that organization.

Feel free to send it to papers far from where you live, but avoid sending it to two newspapers in the same "market." (Sending to the Houston Chronicle and the Shreveport Times is OK, but not to the Dallas Morning News and the Fort Worth Star Telegram.) "National" newspapers like the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor and USA Today generally do not accept op-eds that are also being offered to other papers.

Assure the op-ed editor in your cover letter or body of your email that the piece has not been submitted to any other paper in their market. If, on the other hand, you sent it to only one paper, let that paper know you are offering them an exclusive.

In writing op-eds, avoid excessive rhetoric. State the subject under controversy clearly, concisely and professionally. You are trying to persuade a middle-of-the-road readership. If you rely on facts not commonly found in mainstream media, cite your sources, hopefully as "respectable" as possible.

Try to think of a catchy title. If you don't, the paper will be more likely to run its own—which may not emphasize your central message. (Even if you do write your own headline, don't be surprised if it appears under a different one.)

Be prepared to shorten and re-submit your article as a *letter to the editor* in case it does not get accepted as an op-ed.

Don't be discouraged if your op ed does not get printed, consider it good practice and try again!