

Libraries of Washington State

Letter to the Editor Guidelines

A letter to the editor is an easy and effective way to voice your opinion to policy makers and to educate your community about issues impacting your community and your library. You can use letters to praise good deeds, correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased-article that recently appeared, to explain the connection between a news item and your library, or to praise or criticize a recent article or editorial. Whatever your purpose, your letter will reach many people in your community—without exception the "letters" section is one of the most highly read sections of the newspaper. Because strong opinions and personal views dominate this section, it is recommended that you coordinate your submissions and share your letter with your library director or public information office **in advance of submission** to help anticipate public reaction and ensure that the letter is as helpful as you intend it to be. Refer to your library system's key message document and check to be sure that you have incorporated these messages into your letter. The letters that result in the most strategic impact are ones that address an issue rationally and build an argument based upon the interests and values of the broadest cross section of community. Remember: the reader is probably a library customer. Be a good steward of the library's brand.

Tips for getting published

- Check with your local paper to find out specific requirements on length, where and how to send your letter. Submission guidelines vary.
- Keep it simple, short, and clear—no more than 3-4 short paragraphs (approximately 150 words).
- Link your letter to a recent news story, editorial, or Op-Ed. Reference the date and the headline of the article in your letter.
- Link your letter to a local event, announcement, or anniversary.
- Use your title and credentials—if you have expertise in a specific field of relevance to your letter be sure to include that information.
- Build a rational argument, but don't be afraid to be direct, engaging, and personal. Lead with values, follow up with data.
- Make sure your information is accurate and proofread carefully before submitting.
- Be sure to include your name, address, telephone number (and email if that is how you submit the letter).

Follow-up

- If your letter is printed, be sure to clip it and send a copy to your library director and/or public information or marketing staff person.
- Watch the letters-to-the-editor in subsequent editions for any reaction to your letter. Sometimes letters create an opportunity for healthy dialogue about an issue
- If your letter is not printed, don't get discouraged. Revise it and submit another letter with a different angle at a later date, or follow-up with the editor for feedback.