

How to Write an Effective Letter to the Editor

Steve Bocckino (ncbocck@mindspring.com)

LTEs are one way to win hearts and minds. Here's how to get your letter published.

1. Write a comment about a news piece, editorial or another letter. Free-floating statements of opinion don't often get published as letters.
2. Stick to one or two ideas in your 200-300 words (papers have differing policies on length). Make your opening and ending sentence compelling. Make *every* word say exactly what you want it to say.
3. Don't be afraid to put your own experiences in the letter. Use humor whenever you can. Empathy changes minds.
4. Check your facts. Equality NC has written a great backgrounder, available at <http://equalitync.org/truth>
5. Proofread! Proofread again! Read the letter out loud. Have someone else read your letter before you submit it.
6. Most papers don't publish multiple LTEs from the same writer within a month, but if you get into a battle with another letter writer, that policy goes out the window. If you refute the facts in a letter *without* naming the writer, usually yours is the last word.
7. Furious is fine, but fast and furious isn't. If you write a letter in the heat of anger, cool down before you submit it.
8. Never plagiarize, and never, never submit a sample letter from the internet.
9. When you submit your letter, send a copy to Sara Terry at saju_1@yahoo.com, so she can use it to rally the troops. Send a copy to your friends, too.

Local Newspapers

Durham Herald-Sun
Use the form at
www.heraldsun.com/letter_submit
250 words max

Durham News
Mark Schultz <mschultz@newsobserver.com>

News and Observer
Use the form at
www.newsobserver.com/about/newsroom/editor/
200 words max

Carolina Times
thecarolinatimes@cs.com

Independent Weekly
backtalk@indyweek.com
300 words max

Triangle Tribune
Bonitta Best
<bonitta.best@triangletribune.com>

Duke Chronicle
letters@chronicle.duke.edu