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Advocates in Action: Stop Diabetes! Generating Media Coverage

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How to Write Letters to the Editor

Writing a Letter to the Editor is a quick and easy way to let people know what you think about a certain issue. Whether advocating for more funding for diabetes research or asking members of your community to fight alongside you for more access to diabetes prevention programs, writing a letter to the editor can be an effective way to get the word out. Short, concise letters are always more likely to be published than long, meandering ones; try to keep them under 150 words. The longer the letter, the more likely it will be edited. Keeping it short, and to the point will help ensure the message is heard. Here are some tips to keep in mind when drafting a letter to your local newspaper.

Be Opportunistic.

Every week the news offers us many topics on which to comment.

- Be timely; try to respond within two or three days of the article's publication and always include the date of the original publication. Pick an issue of particular importance to you - don't be afraid to let your passion shine through.
- State the argument you're rebutting or responding to, as briefly as possible, in the letter's introduction. Don't do a lengthy rehash; it's a waste of valuable space and takes away from your argument.

Stick to a single subject.

Deal with one issue per letter.

Don't be shrill or abusive.

Editors tend to discard letters containing personal attacks. It's fair to critique others ideas and views, but name calling will not be tolerated and won't get you published.

Organize your points logically.

Start with brief overview of the argument you are opposing, followed by stating your own position. Then present your evidence. Close with a short restatement of your position or a pithy comment.

Use facts, figures and expert testimony whenever possible.

Backing your argument up with facts will raise your letters above the he said, she said, category, always remember to double-check that your facts are accurate. Readers respect the opinions of people with special knowledge or expertise. Use expert testimony to bolster your argument.

Proofread your letter carefully.

Look for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Newspapers will usually edit to correct these mistakes, but your piece is more likely to be published if it is "clean" to begin with. Read your letter to a friend.

Consider waiting a day to send.

Write, proofread and edit the piece. Then put it aside until the next day. Rereading your letter in a fresh light often helps you to spot errors in reasoning, or identify unnecessary content. On the other hand, don't let the letter sit too long and lose its timeliness.

Adopt the reader's perspective.

Will the arguments make sense to someone without a special background on this issue? Did you use technical terms and language not familiar to the average reader?

Provide Contact Information.

Always include your name, address, day-time phone number and signature. The papers won't publish this information, but they may use it to verify that you wrote the letter.

Just do it!

WRITE! Do not try to draft a perfect letter. Just give it your best effort and send it off. Don't forget to always direct your correspondence to "Letters to the Editor"

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