



## **Let Your Voice Be Heard!**

### **Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor**

Every day, Oklahoma's 220 newspapers publish Letters to the Editor. While we know that only a small percentage of newspaper readers scan the Editorial page and daily letters, let me assure you that 100-percent of your community's decision-makers read every editorial, guest column and letter to the editor. There's no doubt that this forum of ideas is a free and relatively easy way to have your voice heard.

#### Key Tips to a Successful Letter to the Editor:

1. Use e-mail. The letters e-address is published on the editorial page...e-mailing your letter enhances the likelihood of publication and reduces the chance that your letter will be incorrectly transcribed. Always include your name, address, and day phone number for confirmation of authorship.
2. Refer to a recent news article or editorial in the first sentence of your letter. For example, "Your coverage of the critical need for teenage alcohol prevention programs (August 23) is welcomed...." Using this opener gives the letter to the editor a point of reference and gives relevance to the timeliness of your opinion.
3. Keep your letter to a concise 4-5 paragraphs; 2-3 sentences each. Do not give too much information, but just enough to give credence to your opinion. If your letter is too long, it will either be rejected outright, or you run the risk of a choppy editing that blunts the point.
4. Don't take shots at political leaders by name. Frustration and anger are powerful motivators, but too often are sources to regret. Unless you're prepared to have the person your targeting as a life-long opponent, be cautious.
5. Give readers a chance to understand your stake in the issues without getting too personal. It's proper to write "As a parent, I've learned this key lesson....." or "My career as a therapist for abused children leads me to believe that..." You can be emotionally charged without being sensational. "With all we've learned about the needs for supporting quality foster care, I'm outraged that....." is fine, but "I'm angered at the idiocy of politicians who thing that..." is not. Do not hurt your case by seeming shrill or even the edge.
6. Never miss the chance to say "Thank You" to a business leader, civic volunteer, or political official who has provided extraordinary service in a cause dear to your heart. Giving gratitude publicly is always well-received, as long as it's merited and documented. Remember...there are only two kinds of people who respond well to an honest compliment...males and females.

7. If your letter does not appear within a week of submittal, send a polite and brief e-mail asking whether it is being considered...Give the date you transmitted it, and attach a copy of the original. A brief phone message to the letters editor is also a good idea, but if there's no response, don't get angry....Major papers receive many more letters than they have space to publish. Try again. Remember that burned bridges are impossible to cross.
  
8. If you have more to say than a letter permits, you may want to submit a Guest Column. Call the editorial page editor and ask for the paper's specifications re: length limitations and best timing for submittal. You may e-mail a photo, as well, if requested. Make sure the photo is current, clear and well-composed head-shot. Have a photo that has you looking directly into the camera lens. That "far-away glance into the future look" may be suitable for a high-school yearbook, but not for newspapers.