Cheat Sheet Reference for Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor during this upcoming political campaign for the primary, and then general election will be very beneficial for Democrats as we let the values we hold be broadly known to the general public. Letters to the editor are usually short and tight, rarely longer than 300 words.

In very simple terms: Introduce the topic
State your position
Tell a story about why this issue is important to you
Conclude with a call to action
Sign with your full name and address

HOW DO YOU WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR?

GRAB THE READER’S ATTENTION.

Your opening sentence is very important. It should tell readers what you’re writing about, and make them want to read more.

EXPLAIN WHY THE ISSUE IS IMPORTANT.

If you are motivated enough to write a letter to a newspaper or magazine, the importance of your topic may seem clear to you. Remember, though, that the general public probably doesn't share your background or the interest. Explain the issue and its importance simply. Use plain language that most people will understand

KEEP IT BRIEF.

Generally, shorter letters have a better chance of being published. So go back over your letter and see if anything can be cut or condensed. If you have a lot to say and it can't be easily made short, you may want to check with the editor to see if you could write a longer opinion feature or guest column.

SIGN THE LETTER.

Be sure to write your full name (and title, if relevant) and to include your address, phone number, and e-mail address. Newspapers won't print anonymous letters, though in some cases they may withhold your name on request. They may also call you to confirm that you wrote the letter before they publish it.

ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIP/COMMUNICATION.
Develop a relationship with the editor. Let them know of your expertise. Offer to aid them in providing information and data regarding your expertise and passion. Make time to research for them in your areas of interest.

Subscribe to their paper if possible. Hard print papers are struggling financially, and they are critical to our Democracy thru their reporting of local governmental happenings.

CHECK YOUR LETTER TO MAKE SURE IT’S CLEAR AND TO THE POINT.

- Keep your letter under 300 words. Editors have limited space for printing letters, and some papers have stated policies regarding length (check the editorial page for this).
- Make sure your most important points are stated in the first paragraph. Editors may need to cut parts of your letter and they usually do so from the bottom up.
- Try to refer to a recent event in your community or to a recent article – make a connection and make it relevant.
- Try to use local statistics and personal stories to better illustrate your point.
- Make sure you include your title as well as your name – it adds credibility, especially if it's relevant to the topic being discussed. If you are a program director, your title may lend credibility to the letter.

MULTIPLE SIGNERS/MULTIPLE LETTERS

You do not have to be the only one to write the letter: letters are often published with multiple signers. It will often times strengthen a letter to have numerous signers.

You also don’t have to be the only one to write a letter. Several people may write letters on the same topic with the same or slightly different points, and submit them a few days apart, so that the issue stays on the forefront.

Using a few carefully placed letters, you can generate plenty of community discussion. You can also keep an issue going by preventing it from disappearing from the public eye.

FOLLOW UP

Call the newspaper a couple of days after you submitted the letter to determine if it was received. If is not going to be published, ask for suggestions.
If your letter is not accepted the first time around, try again. You might submit a revised version with a different angle on the issue at a later date.

**ESTABLISH A GOAL**

Establish a goal, for example of one letter per week from your County Central Committee regarding candidates, or issues prior to the upcoming election.