

Tips On Writing Letters to the Editor (and Getting Them Published) by Richard Lake, Senior Editor, DrugSense

- >Has anyone written letters to the editor only to see them printed with key
- >points missing (besides me)? What should you do? I don't necessarily want
- >to get on the editor's bad side if it is a current outlet for my points, but
- >they are not being articulated as clear as they could be after their
- >revision.
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- >Any thoughts?
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Well, I don't think I am an expert, but will take a shot at answering your question.

Not much you can do after a LTE is published, for sure. Most editors make it clear that they have the right to edit your letters. They should not alter your intent, but sometimes it happens. I would just let it go.

Instead I suggest taking a little more time in writing your letters to match what the publication is likely to print. Study what they have printed. Notice length of the letters, length of the paragraphs, and the level of English. Most published letters in newspapers are under 200 words, though smaller newspapers sometimes print longer letters.

There are over 5,700 published letters in favor of drug policy reform in a searchable database at <http://www.mapinc.org/lte/>

When I target a newspaper, I go there and use the search tool to search for letters published in the target publication. I then copy samples of the bodies of about a dozen letters, selected at random, into my word processor, and get word counts, reading level, etc. one at a time. I then try to insure that the letter I write is no longer than the average, and is not above the average reading level.

I continue to study the Style Guides linked from this page <http://www.mapinc.org/resource/> There is a wealth of good information about how to be successful at writing LTEs.

Rewriting is important. Most published authors go through at least a few drafts, trying to trim down and sharpen their letters. Then they sleep on it and look at their draft again before sending it out.

Those who have far more letters published than I, like Robert Sharpe, who started his letter writing campaign as a member of SSDP, and who has had published about 200 LTEs in newspapers large and small all over the country and the world (click this link to review his letters <http://www.mapinc.org/writers/Robert+Sharpe>) tell me that even with experience, it may take a half dozen or more letters sent for every one published.

Of course it is nice to be published - but remember that even an unpublished letter sends a message about reader interest to a publication. Thus they all count!

Consider the targets, if you are writing about something they already printed. Editorial page editors select the letters they print. They seem to love letters about their editorials, or about columns written by their own staff. Maybe next in importance, from their viewpoint, seems to be major or feature stories by their own reporters. Last seems to be responses to wire service stories they print.

Not that anything is an impossible target. Just may take more letters and more care in writing for some targets.

Oh, a local tie-in can sometimes be used to advantage. For example, I had no trouble having a letter published about a big talk the local DEA chief agent gave, with much publicity, to about a dozen folks (probably friends and relatives) when he expected hundreds. I suspect they printed my letter - which was about as long as the article about the talk, because it was a local story in my local paper - not because it was my best writing.

Today letters on our issues are easier to get published than five years ago. Questioning of the WOD is politically correct now. And the more LTEs we get published, the more the public will question!

Sending Letters to the Editor is, in the opinion of many, one of the most cost effective efforts an activist can take. We can do it from anywhere. Better than 90% of the publications that print LTEs accept them by email. LTEs have more readership than ads in any publication. So their value is higher.

Our best analysis is that Robert Sharpe's published letters represent a contribution to drug policy reform, if it had been purchased as ads, of close to a Quarter Million Dollars. Yes, \$250,000.00 !! All this in a little over a year of LTE writing.

Looking for prime targets for your LTEs? Just click this link - at least a dozen new prime targets every day!

<http://www.mapinc.org/opinion.htm>

Hope this helps!

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