

How to write a letter to the editor

Paul Russell

National Post

Monday, January 15, 2007

The allure of the letters page is undeniable; it's the one place where the public can have their voices heard. But considering that hundreds of readers are competing for this space, how can you make sure your submission stands out? Here's 15 tips from our letters editor to help you get published.

- Shorter is always better To avoid taxing the editor's patience, and that of readers', submissions should be kept to 250 words. While at first it may seem difficult to express your groundbreaking thoughts in only a few paragraphs, keep in mind this limit is for your benefit. The more succinctly the point is made, the better the chance the letter will be read and remembered.
- Letters aren't mini columns Instead of trying to frame a complex argument, the best letters make a single point, convincingly yet briefly. If you can throw in a pithy observation or humorous twist along the way, all the better.
- Be topical We look for letters that address stories and issues currently on the minds of readers. You may still be angry about Jim Flaherty's flip-flop on income trusts, but unless there is a new development in this story, it's no longer an issue for the letters page.
- Appeal to readers' emotions Some of our best letters come from people dealing with difficult situations. Last week, for example, we carried a handful of passionate letters from parents of children with Down syndrome. Readers sent in notes saying they were moved to tears by these letters, which stimulated both the heart and the mind.
- Draw from your own experience Don't pen a letter that relies on quotes from outside authorities to make its point. We want to hear what you think, not what you read elsewhere.
- Your letter will be edited You could very well be the world's best writer, but be assured that your carefully selected prose will be fine-tuned by Post staff -- and probably shortened -- in the interests of clarity and space. Don't take it personally, but instead consider it a learning experience for the next missive you send in.
- Eschew obfuscation Which is to say you should keep the language of the letter as simple and unpretentious as possible.
- Tell us who you are Be sure to provide your full name, phone number and address. This crucial information is needed not only for verification, but in case we need to contact you about editing changes. And no, we will not publish letters with your name withheld, except in extraordinary circumstances that have to be arranged beforehand with our editorial staff.
- Avoid cliches like the plague It goes without saying that you have to think outside the box. In a nutshell, it's the kiss of death to rely on tried and true expressions. They are so yesterday. Honestly.
- Don't send attachments We can't work with letters we receive as PDFs and a few other formats. For everyone's sake, just paste your letter into the email message, and send it on its way.
- We need exclusivity Don't send your letter to numerous media outlets, thinking that will increase its chance of publication. That only achieves quite the opposite effect. Letters editors across the land, seeing the note is not unique to their paper, will just

delete it.

- Catchy phrasing helps Instead of starting your letter with, "I'm writing to respond to Monday's editorial calling for tax hikes ?" open with, "As an overburdened taxpayer, I ask, 'Are you guys nuts?' ?"

- Play nice Don't attack the personal views of a columnist, reporter or fellow letter writer. Instead offer a thoughtful countervailing opinion and try to advance the debate, which will encourage other readers to join in.

- Know the two-week rule In an effort to allow as many readers as possible to have their say on our pages, we aim to space out contributions by letter writers by at least two weeks.

- Is it an NP or FP story? Letters related to stories or columns published in the National Post should be sent to letters@nationalpost.com. But if you, say, want to blast Financial Post editor-in-chief Terence Corcoran for his views on global warming, address your letter to fpletters@nationalpost.com

Follow these simple steps and there is a good chance your letter will rise to the top of the pile of those being considered for publication in the Post.

prussell@nationalpost.com

© National Post 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Original Article:

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/issuesideas/story.html?id=3eafdfc5-1af1-430b-8bb4-3b1dc3f8abc0&k=26566>

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.