

TIPS FOR GETTING LETTERS TO EDITORS PUBLISHED

I. MY LUCK WITH THE LA TIMES

- 12 letters published, BUT I wrote about 60. A 20% hit rate.
- You need to write a lot. Like fly casting, you need to enjoy doing it.
- See the “I’m Telling!” essay. Even if not published, feel better by sharing.
- Getting the attention of editor: See excerpts from my published letters.
- Read letters published in the paper to get a sense of how they read and what the editors choose.
- Saturday LA Times summarizes letters received by total and by topic.
- Good to plant your thoughts and perspective in heads of editors, not just readers. Also gets the extent of interest in a topic counted.
- Saturday, August 22: 855 usable letters; 164 re U.S. Postal Service; 114 re presidential election; 56 re fires in California.
- Saturday, August 1: 827 usable letters; 97 re COVID-19; 82 re LA Times call for suggestions on remaking California; 78 re protests in Portland.
- Note they say ‘usable’ letters which makes you think about what makes a letter usable: Vulgarity, ranting, insane rambling, hatred? Don’t do that! Or maybe it was it just too long.
- A brilliant letter on an obscure topic may not make it into the paper. But if the topic is important to you, don’t shy away from writing it. It will be noticed and counted.
- If you join hundreds of people writing about the same article, your chance of being noticed is small. Write it to stand out. Remember, hundreds of letters on a topic means that it is important to the readers and the editors notice, so write and get counted.

II. WHAT TO WRITE

- Go with your gut reaction to a specific article. Why does it seem important to you, especially how it relates to Democratic values.
- Editors want content to engage their readers. What unique slant or interesting insight can you bring to the issue? Many letter writers will express the same point of view. You want to offer something different that others have not thought of.
- Can you think of a snappy, attention-getting first line?
- Do you have facts or first-hand experience that would add perspective to readers? Make sure your facts are accurate!
- Editors are concerned with your thoughts more than your feelings.
- You can always write directly to the author of an article. This will not be published, but you can share your insights, information, or experience, as well as provide feedback to them. We don’t want to leave them alone with their thoughts.

III. HOW TO WRITE

- Check the News Outlet sheet Rachel sent out. Try some outlet that is new to you. Many often have longer word length limits.
- Strictly follow the outlet's guidelines. LA Times has a 150-word limit, and you must respond to a story that appeared in the Times.
- Write your letter off line, review it carefully, check for spelling, grammar, accuracy, etc., then copy it into the text box of your email. Submit to the address letters@latimes.com .
- Be quick about it and write your letter as soon as you have gathered your thoughts. Letters in response to a specific article will be published within a matter of days after the article. The beauty – and curse – of email is rapid response.
- Word processing software has a feature that counts the number of words so you can easily know your word limit.
- I don't bother with Dear Sir or Madam or Dear Editor. Just begin with your text.
- In the Subject line, put the name of the article in quotes, followed by the date it appeared in the paper.
- Be SURE to close with your name, street address, telephone number, and email address. They will (often) contact you before publishing your letter – but sometimes you are surprised.
- BTW, they reserve the right to edit your letter. I have never been upset with what they have done, usually they want more space, but once their edit seemed to dilute somewhat my point.

IV. HOW NOT TO WRITE

- Don't even *think* about satire. People don't get it, they believe the absurd scenarios created, and this spreads disinformation.
- Do not rant, but OK to describe your reaction to what you read, e.g., "I feel angry, upset, heartsick, disgruntled, etc" But also, "I was pleased, encouraged, relieved.
- Do not make personal attacks. Stick to values and principles.
- Do not submit canned propaganda. Do not write overt political content for a candidate.
- No letter-writing campaigns. Why would they publish a lot of similar letters, anyway?
- No anonymous letters.