

WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (TO SAVE THE INTERNET)



Why Do Letters to the Editor Matter?

Spoiler alert: Money carries a lot of weight in Washington, but there's a more powerful tool for creating change: your story. The more we tell our stories, the more we inspire people to join our cause. And the best stories are the ones that articulate how issues impact us personally.

One of the most useful ways to get your story to policymakers is to write a letter to the editor of your local paper. Policymakers and their staffs read these letters to get a sense of what their constituents care about. These letters also sway editorial boards and journalists and help raise awareness in the community.

Tips & Tricks

Check the specs. Pay attention to each outlet's submission requirements. While these vary from outlet to outlet, in general it's best to make your point in 250–300 words. Be sure to find out what format outlets accept submissions in – whether they prefer snail mail, email or the use of a designated form on the outlet's website.

Be timely. Hook your letter to something that's happening in the news – in this case, the FCC destroying the Net Neutrality rules.

Express your feelings, but don't get mean. Stick to the facts and remember that personal attacks on policymakers are not effective. Express your frustration in a constructive way.

Go local. You can go local in your analysis even when the issue you're tackling is national in scope. For example, you could explore how the loss of Net Neutrality protections affects businesses in your community.

Provide evidence and context. Don't assume your audience is familiar with Net Neutrality. Illustrate your point with concrete evidence that strengthens your position. Boost your credibility by mentioning anything that makes you especially qualified to discuss this topic.

Don't use form letters. Some organizations provide sample letters, but it's much more powerful to tell your story. Be sure to write a separate letter for each outlet you're targeting. Tailor each letter to the outlet's audience.

Do your research. Read letters in your target publications on a regular basis to get a sense of each outlet's style and approach.

Publishing Your Letter

Identify your target publications. Community newspapers and trade publications often carry more influence than a letter placed in a more high-profile publication. And it's easier to get letters to the editor published in these smaller publications.

Call the editor to ensure your letter has been received. Rather than leave a voicemail, follow up until you speak to a staff member.

Amplify your message. To amplify your message, send a copy of your letter to a group (like Free Press) that advocates for your position.

Outline for a Letter to the Editor

- **Open your letter** with your reason for writing. State the problem that concerns you.
- **Define why** this issue is important. Explain how this problem affects you or others, and explain what will happen if something is/isn't done.
- **Praise or criticize** what a public official has said or done about the issue. Make a positive or critical statement about a public action related to the issue. Support your praise or criticism with concrete details.
- **Offer a recommendation.** Discuss what should be done and explain why you think this approach would work.
- **Sign the letter.** Provide your full name, mailing address, email address and phone number (many outlets will want to contact you before publishing). Include any relevant organizational affiliation.