

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper is an easy and effective way to make an impact on issues that matter. Elected officials, public policy-makers and community leaders all pay close attention to the letters and op-ed pieces in the editorial section, so you can be assured your thoughts will be read by people who create change in your community.

It's true that not all letters are published, but they all make an impact by educating editors who determine the direction of coverage on key issues. The more letters they receive on a given topic, the more likely they are to devote space in the newspaper to that issue—and to hold folks in power to account.

Letters to the editor are often, but not exclusively, written in response to an article that has appeared in that paper. If you're writing in response to a printed piece, be sure to begin your letter by citing the original story headline, the date on which it was published, and reporter's name. That helps the editor put your letter into the context of the story, and the news cycle.

Whether your letter is in response to an article, or more of a commentary on a situation or issue, like Bill 64, for example, there are a few things to keep in mind.

LETTER WRITING TIPS

1. Keep it short and sweet. Well, at least short. Editors reserve the right to edit your text for style, grammar and length. Concise letters are less likely to be condensed.
2. Beware the word count. Some publications have limits on the number of words in a letter, so be sure to check their website for guidance.
3. Keep it clean. Profanity will get you nowhere.
4. No jargon. Speaking plainly and directly so that everyone gets your point will help get your letter published. Industry specific terms or corporate lingo are alienating and, let's face it, annoying.
5. Share your expertise. You're a teacher, so say so. Letting folks know that your experience informs your opinion = credibility.
6. Name your target. If your message is for, let's say, the Minister of Education, then name him. Political staff will be sure to flag it for his attention.
7. Don't send your first draft. Think of your first version as a brain-dump: all your ideas, raw and unedited. Walk away for even a half hour and come back to it. You'll be amazed at how much easier it is to reorder your thoughts and tighten your wording if you disrupt your writing even briefly. Repeat the process as needed until you're completely satisfied with the text.
8. Read your letter out loud. This is a classic proofreading ploy. Your ear will catch things your eyes may not, like run-on sentences and misplaced punctuation. You'll even pick up on "tone" that needs refining. Have someone else read it, too.
9. Don't get fired. The letter should reflect your passion for the issue, and contain crisp, cogent arguments that support your stance. But tread carefully; our target is the government, not your employer. We don't want the letter writing campaign to compromise your professional relationship.
10. Send your letter to MTS, too. We'll be running letters in paid advertising this spring, so if you pen a letter to the editor, send it in a separate email to coms@mbteach.org, as well.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR LETTER:

Here's how to submit your letter to the major dailies in Manitoba. And let's not forget about weekly newspapers in the province. These are extremely well-read. If there's a weekly in your community, check its website or give them a call to find out how you could submit a letter to them as well.

Winnipeg Free Press:

https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/send_a_letter/

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/send-letter>

Brandon Sun

https://www.brandonsun.com/opinion/send_a_letter/