



Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor

Prior to Writing

- Gather key details: Do some web research to learn whether there is a word limit and/or other restriction. Some news outlets cap letters at 300 words. Others set the maximum at 150.
- Determine how to submit letters. Some news outlets accept them via email. Others require submission at their website.
- Review past letters on the same issue to determine whether there are key concepts or positions you wish to make or refute. What are opponents claiming? Is it effective? How can your letter make points supporting your position, while also dismantling the case being made by the other side?

Identify Your Message

- What are the key points you wish to get across? Try to limit these messages to three or less.
- Consider whether you have a unique point of view and if so, highlight it. For example: If you are a veterinarian, you might share that you have extensive knowledge about animal care. If applicable, you may explain that you have seen firsthand the role of animal research in the development of treatments for animals. Or perhaps you can share the perspective as a patient who has battled or is currently battling a serious disease. Another option is to share the story of a family pet or animal you cared for that survived a health challenge thanks to animal studies.
- Consider the audience: Envision who you are trying to reach. Are they predominantly blue collar? What is their likely relationship with animals? This is important to consider. For example, those who live in agricultural areas likely have a very different relationship with animals compared to city dwellers.
- Research as needed. Stats are helpful. But you should only use one or two numbers.
- Are there current events or regional issues you can cite? The coronavirus is one example. Wisconsin's role as an agricultural state is another.
- Make sure you are sharing your unique point of view. Don't simply respond to the opposition.

Additional tip: Sometimes it is helpful to briefly outline your letter before writing.

Writing Tips

- Be sure to highlight your role as a credible expert/someone who knows and respects animals: If your career is dedicated to helping animals and developing health breakthroughs, explain this. If your family has benefited from a medical advancement, share that and how it has changed or enhanced your life. If you have a close relationship with a pet, feel free to mention it. Give readers a reason to respect your viewpoint.
- Speak to your audience. Avoid technical terms. Be aware of their sensitivities. Recognize that we are all animal lovers. In fact, some people more easily empathize with animals than with other humans.
- Reference the study of animals for veterinary advancements whenever possible.
- Don't mention opponents by name. Limit mentions of specific animal rights groups.
- If you have a local connection, don't forget to include that. People are naturally wary of outsiders.
- Provide examples if you can: Research in dogs has resulted in...
- Try to make readers stop and think. Examples: "You can't say you support medical progress if you don't support animal studies" or "Veterinary medicine requires animal research too."
- End with your ask: Clearly state what you want the reader to do. Examples: "Vote no on...", "Reject false claims...", "Don't fail to recognize the importance of science."
- If you can come in significantly under the word limit, do it. A 120-word letter is often more likely to be published than a 300-word letter.

Submission Tips

- Send in your letter with a short cover note. In that note, briefly explain the issue you are writing about. If you are a local resident, mention it. This increases your chances of publication.
- Send the text of the letter within the body of the email, not as an attachment.
- If you want to be sure the news outlet does not list your employer, send the letter from a personal email address and remove any work email signatures.
- Provide a phone number. It will not be published. However, some publications verify their letters to guard against people submitting comments under other people's names.
- Frequently, you will be alerted if your letter is chosen for publication. This may take a day or two. You are not always alerted. Some letters simply appear in the paper.
- Never submit the same letter to multiple publications, unless it is rejected or fails to run after several days. Letters to the editor are expected to be unique to each individual news outlet.
- We do not advise sending emails or calling the paper to check-in on submissions.