

How to... write a letter to the editor

Climate change is the hottest topic right now and humanitarian crises are making headlines. There has never been a better time to get your concerns printed in the media.

All newspapers carry a “Letters to the editor” page. These pages are popular with readers and help the media and decision-makers gauge the public mood, making them an essential tool in any activist’s kit.

The following top ten tips will make your letters stand out from the rest:

1. Your letter should respond to a prominent article featured in the newspaper on the previous day.
2. Look through back-copies for letters published in that newspaper to get an idea of the length, level of formality and standard salutation (e.g. “Dear Sir”).
3. Make your point at the beginning and then back it up with evidence, anecdotes or your own analysis.
4. Words like injustice and tragedy drive us to take action, but won’t help to get us printed. Keep your style and tone in keeping with the other letters for more chance of success.
5. Never attack the newspaper: they won’t print your letter.
6. A little wit and humour, where appropriate, goes a long way.
7. The earlier you send your letter, the higher your chances of getting in: ideally before noon. Before 3pm is OK; before 5 pm is risky; and after 5pm is improbable but not impossible.
8. Remember to give your name, address and contact number. Your letter is unlikely to get printed otherwise, as they need to verify that you’re a real person. They will only print your name and town or city.
9. Do not send a letter on behalf of Oxfam, your opinion as an individual is much more powerful.
10. Don’t forget to check the paper the next day to see if it’s there! If you don’t get in but it’s a topical issue, keep your eye out as it might make it the following day.



What should you write about?

Write about something that provokes you. If an article stirs an opinion or emotion, then it’s worth writing a letter about. Use your judgment and your instinct, but make sure that you use your voice. Responding to letters keeps issues in the news and can help us change people’s attitudes and beliefs. If you are struggling for ideas, use Activist News or the Oxfam website to keep you informed and provide inspiration.

Lastly, don’t forget to let us know so we can shout about your good work! email active@oxfam.org.uk.