SOME TIPS ON WRITING LETTERS TO EDITORS

Political cartoons and letters to the editor are some of the “most read” parts of any newspaper. You may not be a cartoonist; but anybody can write a letter. And people do read them, including legislators, public officials, and opinion leaders. They understand that human behavior is driven more by perception and beliefs than by facts; so they want to know what people in the community are thinking.   
 Many liberals look down on writing letters to editors because so many are little more than partisan rant. Others find writing letters daunting because they think they have to be clever with words. But a good letter doesn’t need to be any more than an honest expression of your own point of view. People who avoid writing letters lose out by default on a valuable tool for influencing attitudes, promoting candidates, and advocating for ideas, issues and points of view. In the “winner-take-all” arena of politics, staying above the fray is a losing strategy  
 Conservatives tend to write more letters, and you can use that to your advantage. Editors want to appear fair and even handed, so they try to pair conservative letters with liberal letters whenever they can. And they often have a surplus of letters from conservatives and are looking for letters with a liberal point of view.

**Timeliness**With Trump in the White House, there’s no shortage of strong ammunition for letters.  
A timely response pegged to a hot topic, or a prompt challenge of misstatements of fact have a good chance of getting published. But don’t wait. The life of today’s hot topic is likely to be brief as it is overtaken by new topics. What matters to the editor this week may not matter next week.

**Authenticity**Letters are more effective when they are personal and heartfelt messages expressed in your own words. Letters that sound like they were cribbed from a slick campaign brochure lose impact and credibility. Editors are always on the lookout for “canned” letters generated by organized letter-writing campaigns.

**Accentuate the positive**  
Editors and readers dislike mean-spirited attacks on individuals, even if they are true.

**Make a memorable point**  
Good letters stick to one memorable point. They start with an engaging hook that goes directly to the main point and close with a call to action or a statement that reinforces their point.

**Coordinating campaign letters**  
When editors get a batch of letters on the same candidate or topic, they typically pick one and discard the rest. So it’s important during campaigns to coordinate timing. Clustered letters can work against each other. But weeks that go by without letters are lost opportunities.

**Repetition and reinforcement**If you want people to remember something, you may have to tell them six or seven times to break through the noise level. The hallmark of an effective political campaign is that it stays on message with variations on a primary theme..

**Proofread, check spelling, and proofread again**  
Careless mistakes make a bad impression and can leave editors wondering if you’re also careless with your facts.

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**Pay attention to publication schedules**  
Kitsap weekly newspapers are generally delivered on Friday; but content is set early in the week. Letters to the editor are not considered news, so they are usually selected early based on available space and the editor’s subjective assessment of relevance and reader interest. I want my letter to be near the front of the line when the editor starts work on the next issue, so I submit mine the previous Thursday or Friday. Editors favor letters from people who live within their reader area, but it never hurts to include all six Kitsap weekly newspapers. The other editors may surprise you.

**Editorial policies**  
Stay within the newspaper’s limits on length -- and be sure to include your name, address, and telephone number. It’s required.

**Make the editor’s job easy**  
Editors prefer emailed Word documents because they are easily reformatted to meet the editor’s needs. Following is a list of email addresses for Kitsap newspapers. Of course, there are also other newspapers (Seattle, Tacoma, Gig Harbor, Sheldon) you might want to consider, as well as such publications as the *Kitsap Business Journal, The Stranger, Seattle Weekly*, and others.

***Kitsap Sun*** (250 word limit; no more than one letter per month per person): [Letters@KitsapSun.com](mailto:Letters@KitsapSun.com)

**Kitsap Weekly newspapers** (350 word limit):

*North Kitsap Herald*: [Editor@NorthKitsapHerald.com](mailto:Editor@NorthKitsapHerald.com)

*Bainbridge Review*: [Editor@BainbridgeReview.com](mailto:Editor@BainbridgeReview.com)

*Central Kitsap Reporter*: [Editor@CentralKitsapReporter.com](mailto:Editor@CentralKitsapReporter.com)

*Bremerton Patriot*: [Editor@BremertonPatriot.com](mailto:Editor@BremertonPatriot.com)

*Port Orchard Independent*: [Editor@PortOrchardIndependent.com](mailto:Editor@PortOrchardIndependent.com)

*Kingston Community News*: [Editorial@KingstonCommunityNews.com](mailto:Editorial@KingstonCommunityNews.com)

***Gene Bullock – January 30, 2017***