



Community Spokes – Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor

The opinion page is the 2nd-most read page in the newspaper, behind the front page. One of the best ways to educate the public about the campaign and build support for it is by filling opinion pages with letters-to-the-editor to keep the conversation about your issue highly visible in your community.

Some Guidelines:

- Letters should be no more than 200 words.
- Speak from your personal experience or tell a story if you can. Why do you care about this issue? Telling your own story will increase the chances of your letter getting printed.
- Make just one point or request in the letter; there isn't room for more.
- Sign your letter with your name, address, phone number, and email address. The paper will usually call to confirm the letter before they run it (but won't print the number in the paper).
- Call the editor after one or two days of sending your letter to ask when they're going to print it. They get hundreds of letters a week so calling will help ensure the editor reads yours.

Some Suggested Angles: (From the Alliance for Biking and Walking)

- Conflict. Does your issue invite disagreement or address an old issue in town?
- Milestone. Has some sort of significant process been made on the project? For example "the town council votes to recognize the local bike/ped committee as a town committee?"
- Celebrity. Is there a local celebrity who is a stakeholder?
- Human interest. A story about a senior who walks regularly, seeking safer conditions.
- Uncovered injustice. Is it fair that walkers, bikers and wheelchair users' safety comes after the convenience of motor vehicles?
- Seasonal story. Kids going back to school, it's time to think about walking and biking safely.
- Ironic account. Why is it so hard to walk or bike on Jones Drive?
- Breakthrough. Councilor Clam decides to support bike lanes on Jones Drive!
- Local interest. Local kids help with bicycle and pedestrian audit.

A successful long-term media approach for your campaign will include a comprehensive communications strategy (above and beyond letters-to-the-editor) and should:

- Stay on message
- Develop and nurture relationships with media professionals
- Involve your members