



# The “Write Thing” for Wildlife

## *Your guide to writing a good letter to the editor*

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper is a great way to get the word out to your community about wildlife and environmental issues. Editorial pages are popular reading destinations – so this is your chance to influence your neighbors, local leaders, and elected officials. Hundreds of our supporters have gotten their letters published. See some examples at [www.defenders.org/exampleletters](http://www.defenders.org/exampleletters).

### *Tips for Writing a Winning Letter to the Editor*

**Know the rules.** Call the newspaper or check out its website to find out the paper’s requirements for submitting letters. Many newspapers even have online submission forms on their website.

**Respond to something you’ve read.** You’ll have a better chance of getting your letter printed if you’re responding to a recently-published article. You don’t need to rehash the article, simply reference its title, author, and the date it was published in your opening sentence. Here’s a real example: “A Bad Voting Bill” (Aug. 3) criticized the bipartisan bill...”

**Be timely and unique.** If you’re responding to an article, send in your letter right away while the original article is still fresh. Don’t send your letter to more than one paper. Most only publish letters that are “exclusive” to them.

**Focus on the message.** Ask yourself what is the most important point you want the reader to come away with. Write that down in one sentence and build the rest from there.

**Be concise.** Most newspapers have strict word limits for letters to the editor (usually 150-200 words), so keep it short and focus on one topic. If your letter is too long or complicated it may be edited or thrown out altogether. It’s okay to be direct, even controversial – but never insulting or abusive, no matter how upset you are.

**Be personal.** The best letters include attention-getting information or anecdotes. Tell personal stories and use examples to help illustrate the point you’re making.

**Be professional.** Type your letter and proofread it carefully. Most newspapers adhere to the AP style guide ([www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)). It helps your chances if your letter does, too so the editor won’t need to reformat it before going to press.

**Identify yourself!** Make sure to include your full name, home address, email address and phone number. Most papers will call to confirm that you wrote the letter before they’ll publish it.

**Don’t give up.** The bigger a paper’s circulation, the more letters they receive, and the more selective they are -- so it’s usually easier to get published in smaller papers. *And take heart:* Even if your letter isn’t published, remember that papers are often influenced by letters they receive but don’t acknowledge. A topic raised in an unpublished letter can often wind up being covered by the paper weeks or even months later.

**Success!** If your letter is published, take a few extra steps to extend its impact. Cut it out and send it to your elected officials to make sure they see what their constituents are writing (and reading) about. Make sure to include the name of the paper that published your letter and the date that it was published. *Then, send us a copy at [letters@defenders.org](mailto:letters@defenders.org)!*

*Defenders would love it if you’d share a copy of your letter with us.*

Send us your letter via email at [letters@defenders.org](mailto:letters@defenders.org), via fax to (202) 682-1331 or by mail to Defenders of Wildlife, Attn: Communications Department, 1130 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW Washington, DC 20036