



Tri-Valley CAREs

Communities Against a Radioactive Environment

“Your Voice is Your Power”

How to Write Effective Letters to the Editor and to Elected Officials

Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE):

What is an LTE? A letter to the editor is your way to speak directly to the newspaper editor and, importantly, to that paper’s entire readership. Letters to the editor can be a great way to get the word out about an issue of importance to you. Or your letter might highlight a pending decision that could affect the community. Your LTE might also be a response to an article you read in that paper (if this is true, note the title of the article and date it ran in your LTE). LTEs can take a position on an issue. They can convince readers with facts, emotions or your experience – or any combination of those things. LTE’s should be short, clear and tightly focused. Each newspaper has its own limits, but generally LTEs need to be 300 words or less.

Why write an LTE? Letters to the editor are among the most widely read sections of the newspaper. They can convince people to take action or think about an idea that’s new to them. LTEs can educate the public, create interest in a topic, and persuade policy makers and elected officials to your point of view. Elected officials often keep track of LTEs and use them as a gauge of what the public cares about. In other words, LTEs can make a difference!

So, now you are ready to write an LTE. Here are some ways to increase the chances your letter will be published and that it will be persuasive to those who read it...

1. Grab the readers’ attention with your first sentence. Make sure it tells them WHAT you are writing about. It should contain your key point. If you don’t do a lot of writing, you can practice saying your opening sentence out loud a couple different ways *before* you write it. After all, a letter is simply a way of speaking on paper.

2. Make sure your letter is focused. This means it is about one thing (not a bunch of things), and that you explain it clearly. Do not bring in nonessential information that “clutters up” your letter. Streamline your thinking, and get to the most important point quickly. Then back up that point with a couple of key facts. Two or three are sufficient. Choose the most convincing. Choose the facts that spoke to you and motivated you to write the letter in the first place. Clarity and focus are the

important factors. You don't have to be fancy. Chances are that "fancy" will only distract your readers from the point you are trying to make.

3. Say why this topic is important to you. For example, if you are concerned about contaminated groundwater at Site 300, you might say that a thorough cleanup is important because water is precious to Californians. If you are concerned about air pollution because you have kids, say so. Whatever is true for you – and will be understood easily by others – put that in your LTE.

4. If you have an opinion, make sure it comes through in your LTE. Say why you think a proposal is "good" or "bad". If you think that, for example, Site 300 should not detonate outdoor bomb blasts that put hazardous materials into the open air, make sure your opinion is clear in the letter. If you think that the community residents in Tracy should be consulted about cleanup standards for contamination at Site 300, say so. Make sure your opinion is both clear and respectful. This means you can criticize a decision or proposal you disagree with, but no name calling or "venting." These things are likely to keep your letter from being published, and, importantly, name calling and venting will not persuade readers even if the LTE is published.

5. Keep it brief. Usually an LTE consists of a first sentence that introduces the topic, two or three key facts that support your position, a sentence or two with your opinion and why, and a final closing sentence telling either (a) what you want people to do (an action item) or (b) what your idea is to make the situation better. In other words, just like when you speak to someone, your LTE should have a conclusion. A short one!

6. Use short paragraphs. Remember it's hard for the reader if it looks like an unbroken long block of words. The columns in the newspaper make even rather short paragraphs look long. So, break up your LTE into multiple, short paragraphs.

7. Reread your letter before sending it. Ask a friend to read it. Read it aloud to see if you like it. Catch your typos before you send it in. (And if you still miss one, forgive yourself. Even the New York Times has occasional typographical errors.)

8. There will be a time lag before your letter is published. This is especially true for weekly newspapers. If you are writing about an upcoming event, make sure you submit your letter far enough in advance. If you are not sure about the deadlines, check the website or call the newspaper and ask.

9. Pay attention to the submittal details. Double check the word limit! Are you under it? Make sure the letter has your full name, your professional title if you have one, your full address (even though the paper will only print the City, they need to see your address), and a phone number where someone can reach you. Some papers want to verify that you are a real person and that you wrote the letter. By the way, if you asked someone for assistance in the writing of your LTE, that's fine. The newspaper just needs to hear it's yours and you submitted it.

YOU ARE READY TO SUBMIT YOUR LETTER – AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY!



Tips of Writing Letters to Elected Officials and Other Decision-makers:

What is a letter to an elected official? A letter to an elected official, whether you send it postal mail or email, is an effective way to bring an issue - and what you want done about it - to the attention of someone who can act on it. Elected officials generally want to know what their constituents think. As noted in the section on writing letters to the editor, elected officials often keep track of constituent letters published in the local newspapers. It is still a good idea to take the information in your LTE and use that to write directly to an elected official in a personally addressed letter. In recent years more and more elected officials prefer emailed letters to postal letters. In the U.S. Congress, postal letters are set aside and scanned before being accepted for delivery, so email is faster and better. However, this level of screening for postal letters is not common for local officials.

Why write to an elected official? There are many reasons why writing to elected officials is important. You can use a letter to explain how a proposal (or a decision that was just made) affects you or your family. This may be something that official had not known. Your letter can help persuade an elected official to your point of view. It can demonstrate that a particular issue is of concern to many in your community (especially if others write letters on the same topic). Your letter can also ask for a meeting, or for an elected official to undertake a specific action. If you are writing to a federal elected official, it is a good idea to get to know that person's local staff as well.

So, now you are ready to write a letter to one or more of your elected representatives. Here are some tips to make your letter more effective...

1. Think carefully about which official or group of officials should receive your letter. Ask yourself two questions. What do I want? And, second, who can give it to me? The answers can be used as a guide to decide which officials to address. For example, if you want your City Council to request that Livermore Lab better involve community residents in Superfund cleanup decisions at Site 300, then write to the Mayor and the City Councilmembers. If you want your member of Congress to vote for or against funding for a Site 300 project, email your Representative and Senators and/or write to their local staff.

2. Get your chosen recipient's proper name and title. Address your letter as you would any serious business letter. Use that person's proper title. Use the formality of "Dear (full name and title)." Close with a salutation like "Sincerely." Use the formalities even if you are sending email.

3. Explain the purpose for your letter. Your first sentence or two should state the topic. As with LTEs, your letter should be clear, concise and focused on one topic.

4. Let the elected official know your opinion. Tell him or her why this issue is important to you. Describe how it affects you. Back it up with a few key facts, but let your voice and your feeling shine through too.

5. Identify others who may be affected, if possible. Who else could this proposal or decision (or topic) impact? For example, if you are writing about Site 300 blasts adding to air quality problems, and your letter talks about the potential bad effect on your asthma, you could note that San Joaquin County ranks 9th in the nation for asthma problems. (Source, San Joaquin County 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment, page 6.)

6. Specify the action you want taken. If you want the official to take a specific action or vote a certain way, ask clearly. You may sometimes state your request forcefully, yet still respectfully. Here, as with LTEs, nasty name calling or “venting” will not persuade.

7. Always ask for a reply from your elected official at the end of your letter. Ask him or her to tell you where they stand on the issue you wrote about. Ask that you be kept informed about any action your elected official takes on this topic.

8. Remember to keep your letter brief. Your letter will be read and more clearly understood if it is short and to the point. It can be longer than an LTE, but not too long! And, do break up your letter into multiple, short paragraphs.

9. Reread your letter before sending it. Ask a friend to read it. Read it aloud to see if you like it. Fix any typos you find.

YOU ARE READY TO SEND YOUR LETTER – BE SURE TO COMMUNICATE MORE THAN ONCE!

“Your Voice is Your Power” - Additional Resources

Steps to submit your Letter to the Editor

TRACY PRESS

Go to http://www.ttownmedia.com/tracy_press/

Click on “Voice”

Click on “Submit a Letter to the Editor” or click “Submit” button.

Fill out the “Contact Information form”

Type your letter in the *Type your letter box. The letter needs to be 300 or fewer words.

Check the “I’m not a robot box”, hit “Submit”.

Or you can go directly to the letter form click link below:

http://www.ttownmedia.com/tracy_press/voice/your_voice_letters/

Click on the link “Submit a letter to the Editor”

Or click the button “Submit”

Fill out your contact information

Write your letter in the space that says “*Type your letter”

Note: Your letter to the editor should contain 300 words or less.

Check “I am not a robot” box

Hit “Submit”

MANTECA BULLETIN

Create an account if you don’t have one

CREATE AN ACCOUNT

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If you don’t have an account click “Register here”.

Fill out registration form to register

SUBMIT A LETTER

Go to <https://www.mantecabulletin.com/contact-us/>

Or simply email your letter to the editor to news@mantecabulletin.com

THE MODESTO BEE

Go directly to

<https://www.modbee.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/submit-letter/>

Fill out form

Note: Your letter to the editor should contain 200 words or less.

STOCKTON RECORD

To submit a letter to the Editor email directly to editor@recordnet.com.

Note: Your letter to editor should contain 250 words or less.

The Stockton Record ensures a diversity of opinion, and so writers are limited to two published letters every 30 days.

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If you would like to have your draft letter reviewed before you submit it, you can send it to Raiza Marciscano-Bettis at raiza@trivalleycares.org

IF A WEEK OR SO GOES BY AND YOU HAVEN'T SEEN YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR PUBLISHED, CALL THE NEWSPAPER AND ASK IF THEY RECEIVED IT (SOMETIMES IT GETS LOST). THEY MAY ASK YOU TO SEND IT AGAIN. IF THEY HAVE IT, ASK IF THEY ARE CONSIDERING PUBLISHING IT.

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