

# working with the media: writing a letter to the editor (LTE)

## why write a LTE?

Most newspapers and magazines have an opinion page that gives readers the opportunity to express their views and opinions. The opinion page is often the most frequently read page of a publication and provides you with a good opportunity to promote your cause to a wide audience at no cost.

Importantly, letters in your local paper will be read very carefully by your Member of Parliament (MP) who will use them to learn what constituents are thinking about different issues. Letters also stimulate interest among journalists. If they see that there are readers who are interested in international development, they will be more likely to write articles about the kind of topics that we really care about.

## choosing your publication

In order to reach MPs, the best publication to focus on is local and national newspapers. Consult Results Canada's [listing of newspapers](#). If you want to reach the general public, in addition to newspapers, plenty of publications have letters pages – newsletters, student papers – where you can notably take the opportunity to promote your group and issues while giving you more and more practice! Many websites and blogs also have areas for readers to post comments. Think about the audience you are trying to target and which publications they are likely to read. It is very important to get to know your target publication before you start writing.

- What types of letters get published in it? What issues are they interested in?
- Check for guidelines on how to submit a letter as these vary from publication to publication. You are usually required to supply your full name and address plus a contact number.
- Which day does it come out? If it's a daily paper, you don't stand much chance of publication if you're writing in response to an article that appeared two weeks previously.

- Choose your timing carefully, most publications work on a cycle. Try not to submit your letter too close to the day it comes out as the stressed journalist who gets it is unlikely to pay it attention.

## finding and creating hooks

A “hook” will help to get your letter published but it’s not the end of the world if you don’t find one. Look through your chosen newspaper and see how many news stories or letters you can make into a hook. Play with the idea. The trick is to think laterally and be creative. Think about basic issues the readers have in common with people who live in poor conditions in the Global South – children, health, education, etc. Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

**Education:** “While I am, of course, delighted at the \$3 million extra awarded for public schools and their facilities (Daily Echo, 10 April), I can’t help but contrast it with another report I read today about the 57 million children in the world who have no access to education at all.”

**Health:** “I sympathize with your reader who waited two days to see his family doctor. For many people with TB in India, there is no doctor and no drugs.”

**A hook is not essential.** If you can’t find one, don’t despair - use another excuse: A personal anecdote: “Over the last few months my baby daughter has been vaccinated against virtually all the childhood illnesses that plagued my own childhood.” Or mention how you wish that Canada ranked as well on the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget as they do in the Winter Olympic Games (see the [Own the aid podium example](#) – scroll at the end of the link) in comparison to other countries.

**A calendar date:** “Tomorrow - World AIDS Day - gives us the opportunity to reflect on the impact this disease is having around the world.”

Need more inspiration?  
Consult Results Canada’s [publications webpage](#).

## successful letters

Keep it short and simple, no more than 300 words. Avoid international development jargon and keep the language simple. Be opinionated but don't rant. Don't be afraid to be contentious; let your feelings be heard, newspapers like that.

Name drop! Politicians will keep a careful eye on when and where their name is mentioned in the media. If you include the name of your MP or another key decision-maker such as the Prime Minister, you can guarantee that they, or at least someone from their office, will take notice.

## aim for a start, a middle and an end

- Start - tell the reader what you're talking about. Put the hook in if you have one. "Great article, Jane Smith, MP! I was delighted to read your very personal account of your time in Uganda."
- Middle – share some facts about the issue. "People in this country may not realize that there are still more than 57 million children around the world who are out of school."
- End – tell the reader what they can do. A call to action - or just to think about the issue: "I ask readers to write to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and ask for his support in calling for more money for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria."

(Refer to our tips on [how to communicate powerfully](#) for more including the EPIC format and storytelling.)

## completing and sending

Having written your letter, don't get stuck in thinking "this isn't good enough". Send it anyway. Any letter is better than no letter at all - and it may just encourage the Editor to publish someone else's on the same subject. If you need help drafting your letter, don't be afraid to ask other members of your Results group or the wider network. Be proud of your letter and take time to congratulate yourself. Share your letter with other volunteers to get them thinking about their own letter. Give even more wings to your letter by publishing it on social media via your Twitter account and by tagging your MP. Make sure to report on your submitted LTE to the Results Canada office via the online report available on the [website](#).

## monitoring

Follow up to see if your letter has been published. If you don't normally buy the paper yourself, ask a friend, neighbour or colleague who takes it to look out for your letter. You can also do an online search to find out if it has been published. When it is published, share it with the Results office (via the [online reporting system](#)) and with other members of your group. You can have an even greater impact by sending a copy of your letter to your local MP (or again, tweet it out to them!) or whoever it is that you want to take action. Again, take time to be proud of your achievement!

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