

MEDIA TIP WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THREE REASONS TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- We can control what's printed
- Newspapers are fairly good about running them
- People read them—the opinion page is second only to the front page in readership



A GOOD LETTER HAS THREE COMPONENTS

THE LEAD — KEEP YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH SHORT AND PUNCHY

LEVERAGE NEWS EXAMPLE:

“The recently released Wisconsin Youth Tobacco Survey reports that smoking among Wisconsin teens is at an all-time low. This is good news ...”

RESPONSE EXAMPLE:

“The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's Aug. 5 article, "Milwaukee's corner taps drying up as bar scene shifts," included a claim from some that smoke-free air has led to decreased business at corner bars and taverns...”

THE BODY — USE THE BULK OF THE LETTER TO REPEAT THE PRIMARY MESSAGE

In a letter to the editor, you'll only have 250 words. The body should include a positive message and a brief background. The goal of a letter is to repeat our central message, not attack critics. Our messages:

- Wisconsin's investment in tobacco prevention and control efforts has paid off. The most recent data show that youth and adult smoking rates are at all-time lows for the state
- Tobacco is still a problem in Wisconsin. Specific populations have smoking rates well above the state average and youth rates for cigars/cigarillos remain high with youth use of smokeless tobacco products and e-cigarettes has increased dramatically.
- Tobacco prevention and control efforts in Wisconsin must continue to help young people from becoming addicted and to ensure tobacco users have access to effective quit tobacco resources.

THE CONCLUSION — REPEAT THE POSITIVE MESSAGE AND END WITH A CALL TO ACTION

“We're making progress in reducing tobacco's burden, but we still have much to accomplish. To get involved or learn more call...”

WRITING TIPS

STAY POSITIVE—Acknowledge an attack only as a vehicle to leverage our positive message.

AVOID NUMBERS—Overuse of numbers dulls the reader's eye. If using, say “about one third” instead of 31 percent.

TELL A STORY—A story makes the argument real and personal - and much more likely to be read.

KEEP IT LOCAL—If possible, refer to the local situation instead of using statewide statistics on tobacco.

SHORT PARAGRAPHS—Because columns are narrow, newspapers use one and two sentence paragraphs.

WRITE SIMPLY—Write as you speak. After drafting, walk away. Reread it later. Edit it and send it in.