

## **How to write a letter to the editor**

By Lung Cancer Alliance

Letters should be short and concise, typically about 250 words, or about four short paragraphs. For a news magazine or a radio news show, they should be even shorter, about 100 words. Letters should be written with passion, using strong but not strident language.

Most newspapers will print guidelines on the editorial page for submitting a letter to the editor. Be sure to consult those guidelines before writing a letter to your newspaper.

Small-circulation newspapers usually print most of the letters that they receive. It is more challenging to get a letter printed in major metropolitan newspapers, as they receive a much larger number of letters. However, if you can tie your letter to a recent article, editorial or column, you will greatly increase your chances of being published. Use opportunities like coverage of new lung cancer statistics or a scientific study to link your letter to current events.

In addition to submitting letters to your local daily paper, consider other newspapers in your area. Most major metropolitan areas have free weekly community newspapers that go to tens or hundreds of thousands of homes. Many cities and states have large denominational newspapers as well. Also consider sending to Hispanic or African-American newspapers, since they are often interested in issues which affect Latin America, Africa, and low-income people in the United States.

When submitting a letter to the editor by postal mail or fax, don't forget to sign it, as many newspapers will not publish a letter without a signature (letters sent by e-mail obviously cannot be signed). Also include a daytime telephone number in case the newspaper wants to verify that you are the author. Bear in mind that it usually takes at least a week from the time a newspaper receives a letter before it gets published. Weekly papers and news magazines take even longer.

With a little practice, writing good letters to the editor is neither time-consuming nor difficult. Your own letter will be more effective if it is not copied from a sample letter, because it comes directly from the heart. No other form of communication can match the impact of a thoughtful letter written by a concerned community citizen.