



# PARENT ACTION NETWORK

An Initiative of Smart Approaches to Marijuana



## Letters to the Editor Tips and Tools

Letters to the Editor (LTE) are among the most widely read features in any newspaper or publication. Writing an LTE is an easy way to raise your voice on relevant topics to your community.

### When you are drafting your LTE, keep **FIRST** in mind:

- F** **Focused:** your letter should be focused on one topic at a time and should tie in your story to the larger topic at hand. Long rambling sentences and digressions will cause people to lose interest quickly. Stick to one subject or point.
- I** **Instructions:** follow the instructions of the paper and their submission process. Look up word count limits before you start writing. Do not exceed the maximum word count! Remaining below the word count increases your chance of publication.
- R** **Relevant:** make the letter relevant to recent news, ideally a story previously published in that newspaper, and relevant to your community. Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how this policy will affect this readership.
- S** **Story:** the LTE should connect your story to the broader issue and to the community. Stories personalize policy, your story shows how this policy has real-world implications and it could happen to them, too.
- T** **Targeted:** target local newspapers and know your audience. Smaller, local papers are more likely to print your letter.

### Drafting Tips

- Write in first person.
- If you include statistics, pick one or two strong stats that reinforce your argument and cite the original source. Check the resources page on the SAM website and the SAM Impact Report for specific statistics and sources.
- Write with a specific target audience in mind.
- **Your first sentence is the most important sentence in your LTE.** Try to answer these points in the first sentence: **HOW** does **WHO** do **WHAT** and **WHY** (these do not have to be in any specific order):
  - Explain **who** you are
  - Clearly state **what** measure you support or oppose
  - Summarize **how** that measure would impact the community
  - Include some context to tell readers **why** you're talking about this issue

**Example:** "As a **Virginian and a mother to a son in recovery**, I strongly oppose/support [BILL #], a **bill that would increase access to addictive drugs in our community.**"

- **In the second sentence, give any necessary context.** Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue.
- **Next, write two or three short sentences about why you've taken your position.** Make it personally meaningful and locally relevant. This is where you tie in more details about your story and why this bill or measure in particular would make your community better or worse.
- **Conclusion:** Clearly state your conclusion, including any action items the reader should take and, if you have room, share the website for PAN ([learnaboutsam.org/pan](http://learnaboutsam.org/pan)) so other parents can get involved.

## Submission Tips

- **Before submitting, take time to review your letter. READ IT OUT LOUD!** Reading your LTE out loud will help you catch spelling and grammatical errors and will often highlight spots that need finessing or clarification. Ask someone else to read and review your letter to make sure your intent and tone comes across clearly.
- **Provide your contact info** – Be sure to include your **full name, address, phone number and occupation** at the bottom of the letter. Often newspapers want this information so they can verify that you wrote the letter. Most newspapers will not publish your letter without this information, but when printed, will only include your name and city. Your contact information is not included in the word count.
- **Submit in the body of an email** – If the submission guidelines ask you to submit your LTE via email, always include the letter in the body of an email (copy and paste it), **never send attachments.**
- It is implied that you are only submitting this piece to one paper; **do not send the same letter to multiple papers.** A paper will require exclusive rights to your submission. **If you have not heard back in a few days,** it is ok to let the editor know you would like to try another paper if they are not planning to publish your LTE.
- It's generally best to submit LTEs **Monday through Thursday,** rather than a Friday or a weekend.

## Don't Forget!

**Don't forget to tell PAN about your submission!**

Contact us at [PAN@learnaboutsam.org](mailto:PAN@learnaboutsam.org) and let us know you've submitted a Letter to the Editor to your local paper. If you're published, please send us the link. We would love to give you a shout out in our newsletter!

After all, it is your voice that makes the difference!