

Letters to Editors

Correspondents should, perhaps, remember the words of Dorothy Osborne (1627-95), wife of author and diplomat Sir William Temple, who wrote to her husband: 'All letters, methinks, should be free and easy as one's discourse, not studied as an oration, nor made up of hard words like a charm.'

Remember that while newspapers receive hundreds of letters each day, only a tiny proportion ever get published because the space devoted to correspondence is very limited. As a result only about a dozen get printed.

Follow these simple guidelines to increase your chances of getting your letter published.

1. **Be brief.** Newspapers are inundated with letters each day, so it is difficult to read several hundred communications. Try to keep the length of your letter to a maximum of 300 words.

Also, a long letter will inevitably have to be cut and runs the risk of becoming unbalanced, even after careful editing. Remember also, that editing takes time—so a short punchy letter that gets to the heart of your argument, and that needs little editing, is bound to be much more attractive.

2. **Don't** start your letter 'So'.
3. **Follow the guidelines** all publication set out on a regular basis on the letters page. It's amazing how many people ignore them.
4. **Stick to the point.** Be very clear what your point is and try to stick to it.
5. **Be legible.** Obviously, typed letters and emails are easier to read, but if you do decide to write by hand, make sure you write clearly.
6. **Move the debate forward.** The letters that stand the greatest chance of publication are those that move the debate forward. Those that merely disagree with a point in the paper or complain and carp without any substance to their argument usually get short shrift. However, those that throw new light on a subject have a fighting chance of getting on to the letters page.

7. **Don't be afraid to be passionate or humorous.** Newspapers thrive on vigorous argument—and a touch of humour never does any harm—but avoid the temptation to hurl insults at writers; it may make you feel better in the short run, but this form of instant therapy only ever gets in the paper if accompanied by a valid point.
8. **Try to tailor your letter for the paper.** Correspondents who proudly announce that they have sent the same communication to 10 other publications are unlikely to see them used: no newspaper likes printing letters seen in other publications.
9. **Resist the temptation to go into verse.** Somewhere out there are several hundred aspiring poets who believe that newspaper editors will clear space on the letters page for their efforts. They won't.
10. **Include your contact details.** i.e., your name, address and daytime telephone number(s), so that your letter can be verified. Many newspapers will not publish unsigned letters, however succinct.

If you do not wish to have your contact details in print, request to have them withheld from publication. This will be respected.
11. **Emailing Letters.** When emailing letters insert 'Letter to the Editor' in the subject field. Newspaper email addresses get bombarded with all sorts of commercial junk and don't have the time or the inclination to read everything.

All this may make you feel that it's just not worth the effort. Not so, the letters page is your forum. Take the opportunity to air your ideas and opinions in the way that will grab the editor's and through them the general public's attention.

If you need any further help, guidance or assistance to formulate your letter, or information on where to send it to, please contact the FAIR office and we will be happy to help you in any way that we can.