

Prevail Blue's Suggestions for Writing LttEs With Impact

In Connecticut, LttEs submitted to printed publications and their online media extensions are successful because people do follow the news in publications. Other modes such as social media, radio and TV are also important, but Connecticut activists continue to get a lot of value from classic LttEs.

There is no perfect formula for the LttE. You must make the LttE interesting by the way you express yourself. Many factors including timing, audience preference, Editor preferences and other factors will determine the effectiveness and acceptance of your LttE. The important point is that your letter must be interesting enough to grab attention and direct the reader to your point of view.

Process Tips

Find the best way to reach the LttE Editor. Publications have more than one Editor, and lots of email addresses and web forms. If you submit on a web form and nothing happens, send an email. If nothing happens, call & introduce yourself, and ask the Editor for his/her advice to get LttEs published. Don't complain, don't demand an explanation, *ask for advice*.

Even if your LttE is not published, Editors will notice if they are getting a lot of input for particular issues, and that can ultimately change their minds about coverage.

Writing LttEs in response to published articles is a good option to leverage existing exposure of a topic in the publication.

Less is more when it comes to length. Find out the length limit set by your target publication and adjust your letter to be shorter.

Some publications have rules about frequency of submissions. If your publication has a once-every-six-week rule for individuals and you want to publish twice per month, then you will need to work with two other people to rotate biweekly submissions.

Local relevance is key to acceptance. You may be writing to papers that have specific distribution areas. If your topic is statewide or national, you need a strong tie to local issues. Mention local situations that people will recognize.

Personalization & Context

Write in your own voice. If you have been given a suggested draft, you must always modify it so that it reads as personally crafted. Your aura will show through the written words.

Construct images and feelings with your words that will create an emotional response in the reader. The best way is to tell a story of yourself, a friend, or the community that others can relate. It's easy to write words that create

emotions like anger. It's harder to invoke love, respect, admiration and benevolence, but that's what you need to do!

Ongoing issues should be called out for track records. If your topic has history that is relevant, mention the good and bad bits. Search the town library, talk to officials, scan the Internet. Also look for past failures and successes that are repeating, and why.

Infuse your writing with turns of phrase and points of reference that are known to be effective persuasion tools (1)

Expect that there might be backlash comments to your LttE.

- Write in a way that does not invite a retaliatory attack. For example, using kindness rather than anger, and calling upon common goals, community values and so on. Anyone who attacks your LttE should appear non-credible.
- Avoid words that trigger conservative emotional value defenses or put all the attention on the opposition. Substitute as shown in the table (2).
- Facts don't matter when conservatives expound their views, but they will try to use facts to undermine your LttE. Make sure that your opinion is backed up with facts, and cite the sources. Also make sure that your comparisons are apples to apples. For example, does it make sense to complain about the rising cost of insulin, by comparing it to Narcan?
- Look other debates on the topic, for example on the Internet, and examples of how objections were handled by others.

To sum it all up,

- Name the problem/issue without jumping into personal blame.
- Use positive, forward-looking language to create a vision of the future.
- Include stories that explain what happens if we continue in the wrong direction, but don't let them consume the LttE.
- Offer a solution and expound on the benefits.
- Identify the persons, ballot issues etc. that we want to be remembered.
- ASK people to tell their friends and take positive action.

If you are part of a larger writing project please only send to the publications that you were picked to cover. If two very similar LttEs arrive from different people, the Editor will notice.

Reference Section

(1) Seven Principles of Persuasion

1. UNITY	The process of influence is easier when we share meaningful social and personal identity. Assert the importance of the topic to the reader and to the community.
2. RECIPROCATION	People will give back to us what we first give to them. (People like to return favors). Explain how the reader gets benefits that in turn work for everyone.
3. SCARCITY	People want more of something whenever there is less to have (loss aversion). Losing health care choices, for example.
4. AUTHORITY	People tend to follow the lead of experts they recognize as credible or knowledgeable. Pick ones that are recognized.
5. CONSISTENCY / COMMITMENT	People like to be consistent with what they have previously said or done. Perhaps, refer to Democratic practices that voters have appreciated and valued.
6. LIKING	People are more likely to agree with you if the LttE presents you as likeable. Write in ways that help the reader feel pleased and at ease with your thoughts.
7. SOCIAL PROOF / CONSENSUS	People will look to the actions and behaviors of others to determine their own. Cite examples that prove your point. For example, situations where minimum wages have been shown over time to be helpful to state and local economies, and why.

From Robert Cialdini's books, Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, and Pre-suasion

(2) Rewriting political trigger words

Instead of referring to ...	Say it as ...
Government spending	Investing in America
Gay marriage	Marriage equality
Gun control	Gun violence prevention
Regulations	Protections
Health care reform	Health care security
Minimum wage	Living wage
Managing Costs	Planned Budgeting

From George Lakoff and Prevail Blue

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