

Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds Guide

Questions? Doubts? Want someone to look over your LTE? Emily Kirkland, Better Future Project Communications Coordinator, can provide guidance and support: Emily@betterfutureproject.org, 646 623 5271.

Why Write Letters to the Editor (LTEs) and Op-Eds?

“The pen is more powerful than the sword.” It’s a cliché, but it’s true.

- Decision-makers read local papers, and they treat LTEs and Op-Eds as a barometer for public sentiment. Publishing LTEs and Op-Eds shows politicians that there’s widespread support for strong action on climate change.
- Clever, well-researched Op-Eds and LTEs can inspire others to join our movement – *especially* if we can communicate the role of grassroots organizing in solving the climate crisis.
- Op-Eds and LTEs allow us to take control of the narrative and speak directly to the public on our own terms.

Writing Your LTE or Op-Ed

Letters to the editor are short (100-150 words) and often written in response to a recent article. Op-Eds are longer (600-700 words) and are more likely to be written by a prominent public figure or expert. Otherwise, the two forms of commentary are very similar.

To start writing, you can pick 2-3 talking points (see the end of this document) and then link them together with anecdotes and personal stories. Mention Gov. Patrick by name, and try to be:

- **Concise**
- **Clear:** make one point and stick to it! Avoid technical language and acronyms.
- **Personal and Local:** talk about how climate change, a new natural gas pipeline, etc. will affect your family or community
- **Clever and Creative:** offer a new perspective on the issue. Write as a grandparent or as a young person, or include references to a famous saying or movie.
- **Timely:** connect the issue to an article they just published, if you can! Keep an eye out for articles about Deval Patrick, state politics, climate change, energy, extreme weather, or sustainability generally. If you can’t think of a connection, tie the issue to an upcoming holiday or event.
- **Factual:** don’t exaggerate, and make sure that you can back up all of your assertions
- **Spell-checked!**

Deciding Where to Submit Your LTE or Op-Ed

The local media landscape is constantly changing (thanks, Internet!). There are three basic types of papers at this point:

- 1) **Large daily print newspapers with tons of staff and one or more dedicated opinion editors.** This includes national papers (*The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*) and some of the bigger regional papers (*The MetroWest Daily News*, *The Republican*). These papers print a small fraction of the submissions they receive, and they only publish commentary about issues already in the news. Often very strict about length – check each paper’s requirements before submitting.
- 2) **Small daily or weekly print newspapers with just a handful of staff** (*Daily Hampshire Gazette*, *Acton Beacon*, *Berkshire Eagle*). Many of these papers print everything they receive, and they’re much more flexible about length, so start writing! Many of these papers share editorial staff with each other (the editor of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, for instance, also oversees *The Amherst Bulletin* and *The Greenfield Recorder*), so keep that in mind.
- 3) **Online-only sites** (e.g., the “Patch” sites). Many of these sites will post everything they receive, with minimal oversight from editors and without any limitations on length. You may be asked to submit your commentary by email, or you may be able to post it on the site directly. It’s up to you to draw visitors to your commentary – you can’t assume that readers will stumble across it.

How To Submit Your LTE or Op-Ed

- **Check out [this Google Doc](#) for an updated list of local newspapers in your area, plus contact information for opinions editors.**
- In general, you should submit your LTE or Op-Ed by email (pasted into the body of the email, not as an attachment!). Follow up with a phone call after a day or two.
- When you submit your piece, make sure to include your full name, your address, and your phone number, plus the title of any article that you’re referencing. They may call and ask if you wrote the piece yourself and if you work for any political or lobbying organization.
- Don’t try to submit an identical letter to many papers, or many copies of the same letter to one paper.
- If you’re uncertain about length requirements or the process for getting commentary published, just call the newsroom or the editor and ask!
- Keep in mind that you may want to get someone else to submit the LTE or Op-Ed – perhaps your state representative, or a local faith leader, or someone who owns a small business? Never be afraid to “ghost-write” a piece and ask someone else to sign it!