

Making Our Voices Heard: Writing a Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed ☒

Sharing different perspectives is vital to a democratic society – just like ensuring that those in power are kept in check. One way to accomplish these goals is to write Letters to the Editor (LTE's) and Opinion Editorials (Op-Ed's). Not only do they reach a wider audience, but the environment for having your voice heard within publicized media has never been greater. To the dismay of many, there have been massive cuts within media publications causing significant impacts on the way labour is reported; journalists are now expected to be a 'jack of all trades' instead of specializing in certain areas. As a result, free submissions to media sources are very much relied upon. In this sense, labour activists are able to take advantage of this regretful situation in order to promote and broaden their objectives.

Having your voice heard in media publications is important because it opens the floor for labour activists to respond to poor publicity (something right-wing media sources are becoming experts at – so we NEED to respond!). It also creates a larger audience - many of the readers may be unaware of labour activities and have little access to finding out, so it's a great way to grab attention. And of course, getting our voice heard costs nothing but our time! Who can argue with free publicity?

With the help of the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM), we hope you find our suggestions for writing useful!

A round-up of tips and tools to get you started on your writing!

1. Understand who you're speaking for, and if there would be a general consensus on what you're writing. But also be aware that no matter what you write, someone is bound to be offended.
2. Practice improves writing skills – not everyone is a natural but the more you write, the better you'll become!
 - a. Reading LTE's and Op-Ed's especially helps. Ask yourself what opinion pieces you like best and why. What was their style?
3. Aim to keep your word count between 100-250 for LTE's and 600-800 words for Op-Eds.
4. Your first sentence should aim to be a hook – get the attention of the reader.
5. Present your opinion/argument in the beginning of the piece, and back up your stance later.
6. Concentrate your writing to a single point. We understand this is difficult as social issues are very woven and complex; yet this is so important in getting your point across.
7. Write short sentences and paragraphs.
8. Provide facts and figures that support your argument.
9. Tie in alternate views, and then take them down!
10. Your conclusion should be clean and simple – offer a solution or suggest your prediction – do not lose momentum in your final words. If appropriate, end with an ask.

You may recall learning about the structure of an essay – it basically contains three major parts:

1. The Beginning – the part where you introduce your argument (in an engaging way) and make a summary of your case.

a. Stating why you're arguing what you are is best in this section. Try to summarize the argument in one or two sentences.

b. Asking questions is useful as well: it allows the body of your writing to answer the questions it, can get readers thinking deeply about the question or they can be pointed towards your elected officials/whoever the piece is directed to.

c. Use your personality! We're guessing that if you're writing about it, you're passionate about the issue – try to make that passion come out in the way you write your LTE/Op-ed.

d. You can also use your experience/life stories to make your point come across to the reader (ask: why should they listen to you?).

2. The Middle – the part that offers facts and figures for your argument/opposes alternative views.

a. It is useful to include interviews or other means of humanizing your argument here – this will reach out to the emotions of the readers.

b. Stick to one issue! Maintain your focus (remember word count!)

c. Provide examples. In order to gather support, you must add facts and examples to your argument.

d. The previous tip relates to this next one – be sure your facts are facts! This may take a little homework.

e. When you include differing views on your concern, be brief but anticipate objections – don't give challengers the possibility to say you don't know what you're talking about.

3. The End – the part that reintegrates your argument, and has a concrete ending.

a. End your writing with confidence.

b. Try to provide a solution or make a prediction.

Almost There...

Once you've completed your LTE/Op-Ed, have someone else read over your LTE/Op-Ed before sending it out into the world! Welcome constructive criticism.

Be professional about submission requirements – find out who to send it to, where the best source is to send it (i.e. if it happened in Saskatoon, send it to local news sources), provide contact information, and follow up once if you haven't heard back.

It is also important to know that you will lose some control when you've submitted your piece.

And if you don't succeed the first time (or second, third...) keep trying! There are countless media outlets so try sending your piece to other media sources!

Happy writing!