

## **Public Relations Tips**

### **Letters to the Editor**

Most newspapers receive many more letters to the editor than they have space to print. This means most require letters to be short. A typical limit is about 250 words. With some exceptions, newspapers generally limit letters to three or four short paragraphs.

Letters should be topical and are more likely to be printed if they refer to a story, column or editorial that was published in the last day or two. Letter writers should respond to whatever it is that motivates them to write ASAP. Otherwise, the editors are likely to regard the letter as stale and discard it.

Letter writers should begin with a brief reference to the previously published item they are commenting on in their letter. They must get to the point immediately and succinctly. Writers should edit their letters several times to remove every superfluous word.

Writers of letters to the editor must identify themselves and give the paper a phone number where they can be contacted for verification.

We want all letters to the editor commenting on ICUF issues to be positive. Writers should propose constructive solutions to the problems that motivated them to write.

Volume can be an advantage in letter writing campaigns. If an issue stirs enough interest, newspapers are likely to run several letters commenting on it, sometimes over a period of several days. We want the Fellows to help us generate letters from several students at your campus on issues where we ask for your help. The more letters we can get published on a given topic the more it will appear to the editorial board and other people who count that there is substantial support for our position.

Most newspapers make it easy for readers to submit letters. Many of them have forms on their websites that readers can fill in on-line and email to the letters editor.

#### **Points to remember in writing letters to the editor:**

- **Follow the paper's guidelines**
- **Identify the published item that inspired you to write**
- **Keep it simple**
- **Edit out superfluous wording**
- **Be positive and respectful**
- **Avoid the temptation to ridicule the other side**
- **Praise officials who deserve it**
- **Advocate constructive solutions to the problem you are addressing**
- **Tell them where they can contact you**

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### **Blogs**

Newspapers are moving into the blogosphere. Most major Florida newspapers invite readers to blog to their heart's content regarding items that been appeared in the newspaper. Other papers have reader forums where they encourage readers to comment on issues discussed in the paper.

### **Op-ed articles**

Op-ed articles are opinion articles submitted by authors who do not work for the newspaper. Most op-ed articles are submitted independently of the newspaper, although the editors do ask specific people to submit op-ed articles from time to time. The articles typically run on the page opposite the editorial page, which is known in the business as the op-ed page. It's usually the same page where the paper runs syndicated columns.

Newspaper impose limits on the length of op-ed articles, usually about 500 words, a bit less than one sheet of 8-1/2 by 11 paper single-spaced. Op-eds frequently serve the purpose of expressing a point of view contrary to the newspaper's editorial opinion. They can be a useful tool, however, for making points with the editorial writers by praising their position.

Newspapers generally accept op-eds on a wide variety of topics, but all op-eds submitted for publication are subject to editing by the newspaper's editors. The final version may differ significantly from the one the author wrote. Responsible editors will discuss the changes with the author, but there are no guarantees. The papers require persons submitting op-ed articles to include their name, address and a phone number. They frequently call the person whose name is on the article to verify that he or she actually wrote it.

Most papers allow readers to submit op-ed articles by email, fax or snail mail. It is not necessary to receive prior approval to submit an op-ed, but it is a good idea to call or email the person on the editorial board who edits the articles to let him or her know you have submitted it.

It's ICUF's policy that the op-ed articles we submit to the Florida newspapers should be positive and offer constructive ideas for resolving issues on which we may be commenting. Op-ed articles that attack persons or groups with whom we disagree are a no-no. The tone in discussing opposing ideas or individuals with whom we disagree should be respectful.

#### **How to write a good op-ed article:**

- **Understand and comply with the paper's policies**
- **Write your article clearly and concisely**
- **State your point quickly, factually and rationally.**
- **Make a better case for your position than the other side does for its**
- **Use personal anecdotes where appropriate**
- **Be positive and respectful**
- **Avoid the temptation to ridicule the other side**
- **Praise officials who deserve it**
- **Advocate construction solutions to the problem you are addressing**
- **Tell them where they can contact you**