



Letter-to-the-Editor Tips

Why write letters-to-the-editor (LTE)?

- Readers' letters are often the most read section of a paper.
- MPs and their aides monitor the LTES in their local press to get a sense of what their constituents are concerned about.
- It's an easy way to get KAIROS' name in the paper (if identifying yourself as KAIROS staff), and to raise a point not covered by an article, or correct an error.
- It's a great opportunity to educate readers about an issue.
- The more letters submitted in response to an article, the more likely at least one will be printed (and one that you would agree with). Your letter may not be printed, but you'll get gold stars for an 'assist'.

LTE Tips (Hierarchy, Formula, and Protocol)

To which stories or opinion pieces should I respond?

Finding the right story or opinion piece doesn't just mean one with a relevant topic. We also need to consider what the **newspaper feels is newsworthy** (e.g. a front page story is more relevant than one buried deep in the paper). The easiest way to figure this out is to follow the **news hierarchy*** of stories, and the closer it is to the top of this list, the more likely you are to be published:

- Editorials and front-page news
- Staff-written columns (i.e. by the newspaper's own columnist)
- Locally-written op-eds
- Syndicated columnist
- Inside news stories
- Editorial cartoons
- Other letters to the editor

*may vary

Tips

- Check the paper to see if there is a word limit. Typically, the shorter the better (under 100 words), especially for the Globe and Mail.
- Be respectful in your communication.
- Know who you are pitching to. Is it a national or local viewpoint you are appealing to? Make a local connection if you can for your local newspapers.

- Avoid the overuse of flowery language and metaphors. Newspapers want news not poetry.
- Don't be shy about plagiarizing from KAIROS online resources.
- If you can mention KAIROS in your letter, in reference to an event, campaign or exercise, please do!
- When writing on behalf of KAIROS do not refer to a politician's political party. If it's important to mention the politician, refer to their title: ie. Minister of the Environment or MP. Note that staff must not engage in partisan activity. We may address public policy, not party behaviour. If you are writing on behalf of KAIROS, please send your letter to Cheryl and Ed for approval, and mark your message urgent:
cmcnamara@kairoscanada.org and ebianchi@kairoscanada.org
- Remember to include your full name, mailing address and phone number(s) so the paper can verify that you are a real person. If they publish your letter, they will include just your name and city.
- Let Cheryl know if you get your letter published. She will dutifully record it and sing your praises.

Putting your letter together: the structure

Letters to the editor (LTE) typically are 100-200 words, meaning you are limited to a few short paragraphs. They are the haiku of advocacy — short and sweet.

Start the writing process by asking yourself the question: *What is my message and how does that relate to the article that was in the paper?*

Opening: In your very first sentence, cite the article that you are responding to. For example:

“RE: Northern Gateway pipeline recommended for federal approval, with conditions
 It’s official. Environment Canada and the National Energy Board (NEB) have given the
 Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline the green light, despite the fact that 96 percent of written
 submissions and 1159 out of 1161 presenters spoke out against it.”

Transition to message: You don’t have much space, so transition quickly to your message. Start by stating the problem or issue of concern. “In 2012 the Anglican Bishops of British Columbia and the Yukon urged the NEB to seriously consider the concerns of the community, particularly those of First Nations, in its decision.”

Propose a solution: This is the meat of your message. “As the Canadian government weighs its options on what to do with this pipeline it should consider the fundamental right of Indigenous Peoples to give or withhold free, prior and informed consent before a resource project of this magnitude proceeds across their territories, which is enshrined in the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.¹”

Closing the letter: Finish up strong either by referring back to the beginning of the letter (closing the circle) or with something punchy. “After all, it’s a right endorsed by the Government of Canada.”

Don’t try to say everything in one letter. There’s no room for it and it muddies the message.

In addition to your name, the newspaper will want your mailing address and phone number (not for publication) to verify your letter.