

Making the Case for Cleaner Water and a Healthy Lake Champlain Through Letters to the Editor

Letters-to-the-editor (LTEs) are one of the best ways people can participate in the political process, reaching a large audience for free.

Here, we offer some basic tips on how to structure an effective letter to the editor and where to send them.

Structuring Your Letter

Effective letters to the editor are generally under 250 words and are simple and straightforward. Your letter is most likely to be printed if you live in the coverage area of the newspaper and if the letter is relatively brief. Either emailing letters (paste text directly into an email) or copying your letter into an outlets' online form on their website are the most common ways to submit a letter.

Here are some tips:

- Be sure you have a “hook” that explains why your letter is relevant. (Lake Champlain and clean water is currently a very hot topic so this is easy in this case.) If you also have a powerful personal story to tell about your use or enjoyment of Lake Champlain or Vermont’s many other water bodies, feel free to write about that.
- Get to the point. Make your point either in the first or second sentence of your letter.
- Offer supporting argument(s) to back up the point you’re trying to make. Try to highlight arguments that will be most persuasive. It can be helpful to identify yourself as part of a group that elected officials care about: a business owner, person of faith, an angler, a long-time resident, the owner of a waterfront cottage, a parent, a scientist.
- Provide your hometown and contact information. Newspapers normally publish the name of the letter writer and his or her hometown. They also often confirm that a given person has written a letter before they publish it so they need your phone number. Just label it “for confirmation only.”
- Follow up. If your letter does not appear after a couple of days, call the news outlet and ask the editor if they plan to run it and if so, when. If they don’t plan to run it, ask them if you can edit it to make it something they would run.

How to Submit Your Letter to the Editor

Newspapers prefer receiving letters to the editor via email or via their websites rather than via snail mail.

Submit your letter both to the local paper(s) in your community and statewide papers. To write a letter to your local paper, search for them on the web and send your letter as the paper suggests. Below is a list of the major daily newspapers in Vermont, with their preferred methods for sending letters.

Burlington Free Press

Email to: letters@burlingtonfreepress.com

Seven Days

(Fill in the form on the web at this site)

<http://posting.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/LetterstotheEditor/Page>

Note: Seven Days accepts letters only in response to their coverage or other content, like previous letters or columns.

Barre Montpelier Times Argus

(Fill in the form on the web at this page)

<http://www.timesargus.com/section/INFO0302>

Rutland Herald

(Fill in the form on the web at this page)

<http://www.rutlandherald.com/section/INFO0302>

Brattleboro Reformer

Email to: news@reformer.com

Bennington Banner

Email to: news@benningtonbanner.com

Addison Independent

(Fill in the form on the web at this page)

<http://www.addisonindependent.com/200707letter-editor>

St Albans Messenger

Email to: emerson@samessenger.com

Caledonian Record

(Fill in the form on the web at this page)

<http://caledonianrecord.com/Formlayout.asp?formcall=userform&form=4>

Remember: sign your letter with the name and hometown. Be sure to include phone number with a note that says "for confirmation purposes only."

