

# Media Tip Letters to the Editor / Op-Eds

Three reasons to write a letter to the editor or op-ed:

- We can control what's printed
- Newspapers are fairly good about running them
- People read them—the opinion page is second only to the front page in readership

A good letter has three components:



## The Lead

Keep your opening paragraph short and punchy.

Two examples:

*Leverage News:*

“The Centers for Disease Control’s report yesterday showing that smoke-free laws reduce heart attacks is exactly why Our Town needs to act...”

*Attack:*

“Bob Smith is entitled to argue that he doesn’t like laws that would protect public health, but he’s not entitled to create his own set of facts. In case he missed them, here are those facts...”



## The Body

Use the bulk of the letter to repeat the primary message.

The goal of a letter or column is to repeat our central message, not attack critics.

Our messages:

- Everyone has the right to breathe clean, smoke-free air.
- Tobacco taxes save lives and money
- The Tobacco Prevention & Control Program is paying dividends for Wisconsin’s health

In a letter to the editor, you’ll only have 250 words. The body should include a positive message and a brief background. In a column, you’ll have 500 words. Include four or five paragraphs to summarize your main messages then use facts to back those messages up.

## The Conclusion

Repeat the positive message and end with a call to action.

“Smoke-free air is good health policy and good business. We need our community leaders to understand the positive impact smoke-free policies can have on our families, employees, and visitors. In fact, our lives depend on it.”