

## Letters to the Editor: How to Write Them

The City of Tucson is just small enough to allow a writer a reasonable chance to obtain publication of a letter to the editor. With the Arizona Daily Star, despite the obvious political orientation of the editorial staff, certain ground rules appear to enhance the possibility of having a letter accepted:

1. **Administrative.** Comply with the basic rules established by the paper. The Star, for example, requires all letters to be accompanied by the writer's name, address, email address, daytime telephone number, and occupation. Submission via email is acceptable, but the paper will not accept emails with attachments, probably out of the fear of attracting computer viruses. Address the letter to *letters@azstarnet.com* and include all information in the body of the message.

2. **Length.** Submissions of more than 150 words are seldom accepted; in fact, shortening the length to approximately 100 words may enhance the chances. At the other end of the spectrum, curt comments of only a sentence or two, however pithy and entertaining, do not seem to meet with much success either. Articles of about 750 words, containing the picture and credentials of the author, may be submitted as guest editorials.

3. **Topicality.** The Star focuses temporary attention on "hot" issues for a day or two. This results in clusters of letters addressing various aspects of those issues. Rapid response to the appearance of the paper's emphasis of the moment may enhance publication chances. For example, the controversy over the F-35 fighter is now "hot."

4. **Tone.** The Star editorial staff would rather deal with issues, not individuals. They do not look favorably on ad hominem attacks or letters dealing strictly with personalities. It is tempting to respond to some of the boneheaded opinions we all too frequently see in southern Arizona, but such responses are seldom accepted. Any letters submitted under such circumstances should contain new material, not, "Not so!" Letters should be polite, reasoned, and logical, with little emotion involved.

5. **Viewpoint.** The progressive orientation of the Star's staff and of its regular Tucson-area contributors is both an irritant and an opportunity. The immediate result is ordinarily a surfeit of left-leaning opinion, leaving ample room for opposing viewpoints. Despite their unusual political orientation, these people are not ignorant, and they appear to respect well-reasoned and solidly constructed arguments, even if the opinions support the conservative way of looking at life and politics. At the same time, the editors appear to resist "Vote for John" types of letters. Messages of political support, particularly at times outside the election seasons, should be embedded within discussions of more substantive topics. For example, a recent letter in support of Senators Kyl and McCain was published as least in part because the main theme of the letter was disdain for Congressional support of earmarks.

My suggestion is to maintain a list of subjects that your candidate supports, be on the alert for times when the paper is emphasizing any of those subjects, and then relate your candidate's superb and original thinking regarding the subjects themselves. The name is therefore placed in prominence as a byproduct of discussions of interest to the public at large.

6. **Expertise.** The writer's background, credentials, and experience wield some weight in the decision to publish or not. A military officer writing about specific weapons systems, for example, may mean more to the editorial staff than a cranky neighbor merely complaining about aircraft noise above Sixth Street. Teachers, businesspeople, security personnel, and medical professionals are all published more frequently than others. Unfortunately, local peaceniks, "activists," "artists," and self-styled mystics also rank high in the Star. But that's another story.

## **Sample Letter to the Editor**

I rise in praise of the current majority in the State Legislature. It is too easy (and obnoxiously erroneous) to say that the members despise children, hate higher education, and dislike the poor so much that they are ready to shred their safety net. No, I contend that they are showing admirable foresight in avoiding the financial calamity that is befalling a profligate, business-toxic, government-centric California. In addition, they see the folly that is Washington in stifling business recovery through misguided taxation, entitlement, and income redistribution policies. Now is the time to recognize the cautionary tales being enacted by our neighboring state and our nanny federal government. Let's storm to the front of the pack in making Arizona entrepreneur- and tax-friendly. A recovering economy will complete the process and make this temporary pain worthwhile.