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MEDIA RESPONSE

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TAKE ACTION! WRITING TO EDITORS

ARCHIVE

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How To Write a Letter to an Editor

Writing your first letter to an editor can be a little nervewrecking. But remember that millions of people do this every day, and very few of them are professional writers. Just be brief, be clear, speak your mind, and send it along. The worst thing that can happen is that it won't be printed. But even so, the staff of the paper will have heard your concerns and may be positively affected by them. So take a deep breath, sit down for ten minutes, and write!

Step 1. BRAINSTORM YOUR LETTER

So you've just read a problematic article about rape and you want the editor to know what you think. Brainstorm your response before you write your letter. Underline the parts of the article that you want to focus on, jotting down notes. Then zero in on the one main point you want to convey to the editor. Stay focused on that. Letters to editors must be timely. When you read an article that offends you, write a letter to the editor that day. Generally newspapers will not print a letter relating to an article that is more than a few days old.

Step 2. DRAFT YOUR LETTER

A letter to an editor should be concise, clear, and professional but still sound like YOU. Here is one relatively simple model you can follow that will work every time!

-Greet your reader

(Dear NY Times Editor)

-Identify the article

(I am writing in response to "article title" by reporter's name printed on date.)

-Identify the problem using an example

(Stating that "quote from the article that made you mad" perpetuates the myth that most rapes are committed by crazed strangers.)

-Explain why it's a problem

(The vast majority of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows, and yet these cases are rarely reported in your paper.)

-Offer an alternative

(When reporting on a stranger rape, please contextualize the case by reminding readers that stranger rapes are not nearly as common as rapes committed by people the victim knows)

-Close and sign

(Sincerely, your name, your email, your address, your day and evening phone numbers)

Step 3. CHECK YOUR WORK

Your letter should be quite concise - no longer than 150-250 words, so omit anything that does not help make your point or that sounds like a rant. Proofread your work! You don't want to send a letter with spelling and grammar errors. Refer back to your brainstorm. Did you convey your main point?

Step 4. SEND YOUR LETTER!

Send your letter to the editor and to the reporter! The contact info will be on paper's website or letters page. Here are some common addresses: letters@newsday.com, letters@nytimes.com, and letters@nypost.com.

Now that you've written your letter to the editor, invite your friends to do the same! And of course you can use these same guidelines to voice your concerns about any issue you see printed!

Sample Letter to an Editor

Dear *Metro* Editor:

Your "the naked city" column headline on July 3rd read "Crime: Former Olympian charged with raping 5 women." The crime is obviously not that the man was charged with rape, but that five women were attacked and raped.

It is common that in a media-covered rape case the public is quick to assume that a rape did not occur and that the victim is lying. Headlines such as yesterday's perpetuate the notion that it is worse to be accused of or charged with rape than it is to be raped. On the very same page, your headlines read that a cop was killed ("Cop struck, killed by minivan") and a gay woman unjustly expelled from a restaurant ("Lesbian booted from eatery after bathroom gender flap").

It would make sense that the rape story would follow suit and be framed in a way that is sympathetic to the victims, not the perpetrator - for instance "Five women raped in parks". Please be more careful in how you frame your news stories.

Sincerely,

Emily Brandt
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