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I was always taught that when you're lucky enough to learn something or have some advantage you should share it.

Areva Martin

Advocacy is hard work, but transforming your passion into results can be made a lot easier if you have the right tools.

In this section we will give a variety of tools to help you be a better advocate whether you are a student, parent, teacher, school administrator or just a concerned citizen. Those tools include:

- **Key writing tips** ..... T2
- **Tips for writing letters to the editor** ..... T3
- **Sample letters to the editor** ..... T4
- **Tips for writing op-eds** ..... T5
- **Sample op-eds** ..... T6
- **Tips for writing blogs**..... T7
- **How to invite lawmakers to your school**..... T8
- **Tips for canvassing**..... T9



**M**any of the best ways of drawing attention to an issue involve telling your story through persuasive writing. These can include writing a letter to the editor, writing an op-ed, or writing a blog post. On this page we will focus on some key writing tips and suggestion. On the following pages we will examine specific tips and provide examples for writing a letter to the editor, an op-ed piece and a blog post.

## UNDERSTAND YOUR READER

Before writing anything it is important to understand who you want to persuade with your writing

- **DEMOGRAPHICS** What is the age, education, lifestyle, career status, interests of the people you are trying to persuade?
- **KNOWLEDGE** How much knowledge do your readers have about what you are advocating for.
- **ATTITUDE** Do you expect your readers to be friendly and receptive to your issue or do you expect them to be hostile or unpredictable?
- **INFORMATION AND VALUES** Do you have new information that might surprise and persuade your readers? What are your readers' values?

## BEWARE OF WORDINESS

Writing concisely is key to quickly persuading your reader to support your cause. Overly wordy writing can confuse and alienate readers.

- **FILLER PHRASES** Avoid filler phrases like “Due to the fact that” or “For all intents and purposes.”
- **CIRCUMLOCUTIONS** Don't use phrases like “in the event of” when you can just “if” or “there is a chance that” instead of “may.”
- **USE SHORT WORDS** “Start,” “Need,” “Try,” or “Often” are better than “Commence,” “Requires,” “Endeavor,” or “Frequently.”
- **AVOID REDUNDANCIES** Don't use phrases like: “Personal opinion,” “Joint collaboration,” “Basic essential,” “Usual habit,” “Completely finished,” “Future prospects,” “Past history,” or “Terrible tragedy.”

## WRITING PERSUASIVELY

Writing persuasively can be achieved by using reason to appeal to your reader's knowledge, using emotion to motivate your readers or using common beliefs or values to connect with your readers

- **STATE YOUR POINT** Always be clear about what you are advocating for.
- **USE “BECAUSE”** Give your readers a reason to agree with your point of view.
- **USE COMPARISONS** Connect your argument with commonly held beliefs.
- **REPEAT YOUR POINT** Use different wording to reiterate your point in your writing.

## PROFFREAD, PROOFRED, PROOFREAD!!

It is incredibly easy to make mistakes when writing passionately, and equally easy to miss those mistakes when you read your own writing (you know what you think you are saying in your head even if that is not what is actually on the page).

Spelling or grammar mistakes and left out words not only decrease your credibility with your reader, but can also change the meaning of what you are trying to say.

Here are some key tips to help catch those mistakes before you publish your writing:

- **Take a break from your writing and come back with fresh eyes**
- **Double check all of your facts, numbers and proper names**
- **Always spell check but also consult a dictionary or trusted online source**
- **Read your writing aloud**
- **Always proofread from a physical, printed copy of your writing**
- **Ask other people to read it and catch the mistakes you miss**
- **Learn the mistake you frequently make and look for them**

**W**riting a letter to the editor, or LTE, is a great way to share your story and get more people in your community talking about the issues you care about.

## HOW TO SUBMIT TO MAJOR MISSOURI NEWSPAPERS

### KANSAS CITY STAR

**Letters:** Online form, or submit letter to The Star, 1729 Grand Boulevard, Kansas City, MO 64108. Up to 200 words.

**Circulation:** 176,197 (daily) and 263,288 (Sunday) | Online: 3.5 million unique monthly visitors (2013)

### ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

**Letters:** 200-250 words. The shorter the better. No unsigned letters, or letters with pseudonyms. If you are responding to a specific article, letter, or editorial, please include date of publication. Letter must include your address and a daytime number. If considering letter for publication, will call to verify authorship. Mail: Letters to the Editor, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 900 North Tucker Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63101. Email letters@post-dispatch.com . Plain text, no attachments.

**Circulation:** 186,820 (daily) and 479,281 (Sunday) | Online: More than 3 million unique monthly visitors (2014)

# KNOW REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**Every newspaper has different requirements for submitting a letter to the editor so before you start writing it is always a good idea to call or check the website to know what those requirements are, but here are some basic guidelines:**

- **KEY INFORMATION** Always start a letter with “To the Editor,” and include your name,

address and contact information

- **LENGTH** Most newspapers restrict letters to the editor to 200-300 words
- **FREQUENCY** Most newspapers will restrict the number of times you can submit a letter, usually limiting it to once a month
- **EXCLUSIVITY** Many larger papers will require that you not submit the letter to other media outlets

## TIPS FOR GETTING PUBLISHED

**Whether or not your letter is actually published is entirely up to the paper’s editorial board. Here are some tips that will make it more likely they will decide to share your letter with their readers:**

- **READ OTHER LETTERS** Check out the types of letters that are frequently published in the paper’s opinion page and try to match their style and tone
- **RESPOND TO CURRENT ISSUE** If your letter is responding to an article in the paper or another letter or a current issue, then

it has a better chance of being published

- **LEAD WITH YOUR POINT** Try to get your most important points in the first paragraph. Make sure you also explain why your point is important to the community
- **SEND YOUR LETTER IN EARLY** Many papers plan their opinion pages a week in advance
- **MAKE SURE THEY GOT YOUR LETTER** It is always a good idea to call the paper and make sure they received your letter
- **ALWAYS THANK THEM** If your letter is published don’t forget to send the paper a thank you

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR TEMPLATE

<Date>  
 <Name of media outlet or publication>  
 Attention: <Dr./Ms./Mr. editor's first name and last name or Editor>  
 <Address 1>  
 <Address 2>  
 <City, State/Province, Zip/Postal Code>

**To the Editor:***Introduction*

<State your reason for writing here including key points. If you are responding to articles or editorials by the media outlet, use the first sentence to reference the name of the publication (in italics), the title of the article, author's name and date when it appeared.>

*Case*

<State your case here. Include facts, references or research here to establish credibility. Mention your expertise on the issue.

**Include a call to action, asking readers to follow up with some activity, such as calling on policymakers to address the issue.>**

*Conclusion*

<End with a strong, positive statement in support of your case.>

Sincerely,

<Writer's signature>

<Name of writer>

<Writer's email>

<Writer's address>

<Daytime contact information>

## About Missouri's Charter School Program – A Rebuttal

Carmen Ward -- Published in Columbia New-Tribune

**To the Editor:**

I thank the Missouri House for passing HB634. As a parent of a special needs child, I feel this is a strong step in the right direction for charter school choice and inclusion for all children. In a recent article titled, "About Missouri's Charter School Program" by Peggy Placier and Diane Suhler from the League of Missouri Women Voters, they do Missouri children a disservice by unfairly misrepresenting charter schools. Because I have had my son in two charter schools and two traditional schools, I know first-hand the differences between charter and traditional public schools. Charter schools actually

have more accountability than traditional schools because they can be shut down for poor performance. Furthermore, charter schools take the same MAP test as traditional public schools. The charter schools, on average, score higher than traditional public schools in St. Louis and Kansas City in both math and reading. Charter schools serve children with special needs like my son who is autistic and children who are homeless, less fortunate and have various backgrounds. The majority of the children served are city residents that live in single parent homes in neighborhoods riddled with crime. Charters are not in the business to make money. There are no for-profit charter

operators in Missouri and charter schools, in fact, receive less money than traditional public schools. Because charters have their own school boards, they have the flexibility to meet the needs of the children that have been underserved for decades. For example, as a single mother, my son's charter school provides support to me after school hours so he's not alone and provides additional educational resources to him on the weekends. A traditional public school is not allowed to perform these supportive services. Charter schools support the forgotten sector of the community. When these children arrive they are four or five grade levels behind.

After integration and hard work children begin to see progress in all subject areas; also in their self-confidence. Not all charter schools are high performing but my son's charter school far outperforms all the traditional neighborhood public schools and provides a higher level of special needs services. Quoting the League of Women Voters of Missouri, they state, "For these reasons the charter school program in Missouri is seriously flawed." I agree the charter school program in Missouri is seriously flawed because they are limited in the ability to expand and reach all students in Missouri that need their support. This is the reason the Senate should pass HB634.



**O**p-eds are a great way to shape public opinion, usually in the form of a 500-800 word column written by some with expertise on a current issue.

## HOW TO SUBMIT TO MAJOR MISSOURI NEWSPAPERS

### KANSAS CITY STAR

**Op-eds:** Up to 600 words. Include one sentence description on author. Include city of residence, and daytime phone number. All submissions are edited. May become property of the Star. Include color photo of the author. Send to oped@kcstar.com.

**Circulation:** 176,197 (daily) and 263,288 (Sunday) | Online: 3.5 million unique monthly visitors (2013)

### ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

**Op-eds:** Preferred length is 700 words. Op-eds substantially longer or shorter will not be considered. All submissions must contain a one-sentence bio of the writer and relevant background, daytime phone number and email address. To submit an opinion article for consideration, email your submission to trobberson@post-dispatch.com.

**Circulation:** 186,820 (daily) and 479,281 (Sunday) | Online: More than 3 million unique monthly visitors (2014)

## KEY GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN OP-ED

Most of the tips for successfully publishing a letter to the editor also apply to op-eds. Here are some additional guidelines to help get an op-ed published:

- **JUMP AT OPPORTUNITIES** Timing is key, so keep an eye on the news and submit an op-ed when it directly relates to a current issue
- **OFFER GRAPHICS** Many newspapers will want to publish a picture of the author along with an op-ed and some may have space to publish some form of illustrative picture as well
- **MAKE ONE ARGUMENT BUT MAKE IT WELL** Don't try to cram too much into your op-ed, but make sure you provide strong supporting facts
- **PROVIDE SOLUTIONS** After highlighting a problem, make sure you provide clear ways that those issues can be solved.
- **SPEAK FROM YOUR HEART** Use your personal knowledge and experience

to connect with the reader

- **AVOID JARGON AND THE PASSIVE VOICE** Many readers may not understand acronyms or jargon so use plain language. Speaking in the active voice is always more convincing
- **INCLUDE A BIO** Always include a bio of yourself which highlights why you are an expert on what you are writing about
- **PITCH YOUR OP-ED** Always include a pitch for your op-ed in the submission email. The pitch should explain why the op-ed is timely, why people should care and why you are the best person to offer a viewpoint on the issue. The email should also include contact information
- **FOLLOW UP** Be prepared to answer questions about your op-ed if an editor calls and is interested in publishing it. If you do not hear from the paper within a week of your submission call and ask about its status

## OP-ED TEMPLATE

## &lt;SUGGEST A HEADLINE&gt;

## LEDE

<Set the scene and grab the reader's attention in your initial introductory sentence. Make sure to have a news hook that makes your piece timely.>

## THESIS

<State your main argument here and be clear about why it matters.>

## Argument

<Explain how you will make your argument in your Op-ed by listing key points. >

## Point 1

<Present several points of evidence to prove this point drawn from stats, news, recent academic studies, expert quotes, history or firsthand experience, End with a conclusion summarizing the

evidence. >

## Point 2

<Follow same format as Point 1. >

## Point 3

<Follow same format as Point 1. >

## Limitations

<Cut off opponents to your viewpoint by acknowledging any limitations in your argument. >

## Conclusion

<Restate your lede with additional comments based on the evidence you provided. >

<Name of writer>

<Writer's email>

<Writer's address>

<Daytime contact information>

## Op-ed: Child endangerment, Mike Jones and education pluralism

Brian Murphy, Board President, Children's Education Alliance of Missouri  
Published in The St. Louis American on March 19, 2018

In a recent column, Missouri State Board of Education member Mike Jones attacked the school choice movement as “unhinged libertarians who want to dismantle the public infrastructure that makes civil society possible.”

Mike Jones is my friend and is one of the first people I spoke with as I sought guidance on the question of how to better prepare our children to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving job market and society. I understand his passion for this subject and completely agree with him that we cannot continue to see our children and others across this nation be permanently locked into failing education systems that have not functioned well for decades.

As the board president of the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri (CEAM), Missouri's most effective school choice advocacy organization, I believe that Jones is fundamentally wrong on the issue of school choice.

That being said, I believe that Jones is dead right on a number of other arguments he makes in his “Public education and child endangerment” column.

Mr. Jones is absolutely correct that any child should be able to go to any (not just any public) school in metropolitan districts. Jones is also correct that public education is in desperate need of deep structural reform for students of all races and demographic

backgrounds. This is particularly true for children of color in Missouri and across our nation.

That is why CEAM has spent years helping families in districts like Normandy and Riverview Gardens fight for their right to attend a quality school. Our organization even went so far as to sue the very board that Jones serves on to ensure that those rights were upheld.

As a member of the state Board of Education, Jones knows that in Missouri, only 67 percent of our school children are proficient in English language arts and less than 50 percent are proficient in math. One in 10 Missouri public school students is trapped in an underperforming school that, by the state's own evaluation program, would receive a letter grade of C, D or F. Most of the latter are located in the urban centers of St. Louis and Kansas City.

I agree with Jones that continuing to ignore these horrible statistics makes our society guilty of child endangerment.

That is why we hope he, and our state, will give serious consideration to the idea of education pluralism – the idea that a mosaic of diverse schools can be funded and regulated by the state, but not necessarily delivered by our outdated district school system.

This is not a radical idea. In fact, it is the norm in most democratic countries and has had great success in some forward-thinking cities across our own country, including New Orleans, Washington, D.C., Denver,

Indianapolis, and Springfield, Massachusetts. We have even seen that it can happen right here in St. Louis and Kansas City.

When given the freedom to use innovative education models, schools like the Biome Schools, Northside Community School, University Academy, and Academie Lafayette have made lasting differences in their communities.

We believe that expanding access to schools like these is part of the structural reform our education system so badly needs. We do not want to destroy public education. We just want to make sure that every child has the ability to attend a good school that meets their needs, whether those needs be based on pedagogical instruction styles, religious beliefs, special interests, or physical needs.

We should create true equity and join the rest of the world in giving parents and students, regardless of race or income, the freedom to choose the school that works best for them and give them the means to, as Paulo Freire writes, “deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

Jones and I have some disagreements about how to do this. However, I am certain that both of us would welcome more passionate voices from our community to demand a better educational product for our children. This effort demands a sense of urgency. Our society is moving too fast and will leave behind those children.

**B**logging is a great way to spread your message and can be used as a basis for social media posts, a way to highlight advocacy events, and a central place to collect calls to action.

## HOW TO GENERATE BLOG CONTENT

Blogging is a great way to share your own ideas and thoughts, but sometimes it can be hard to figure out what to write about. Here are some tips for finding ideas to spur your writing process

- **GOOGLE NEWS ALERTS** Set up Google News alerts for topics you are interested in. News stories about changes related to your issue can help lead to new perspectives in your writing.
- **FOLLOW OTHER BLOGS** Seeing what other advocates are writing is a great way to judge which direction the state-wide or national conversation is moving.

## TYPES OF BLOG POSTS

We usually think of a blog as a written format, but multimedia can really make a message pop and sometimes your blog should be used to highlight calls to action or tell personal stories.

- **VIDEO BLOGS** Video blogs give the reader/viewer a more personal sense of who the people behind the blog are. Furthermore, posting the video blog to YouTube and then linking it to your page can help increase traffic.
- **ACTION ALERTS** A quick call to action asking your readers to support a bill being considered or join you for an advocacy event can be quick and effective ways to keep your readers engaged in your campaign.
- **AGGREGATED POSTS** Sometimes a round up of

In Missouri, check out the CEAM blog and the Show Me Institute for education reform issues. Nationally, EdChoice and the 74 million are great resources.

- **REPLICATION IS OKAY** It's okay to use big block quotes from others to set-up the background to an issue. You don't have to be the expert this way, and it gives you more space to include more of your own (or your organization's) opinion. It is also okay to write about issues you have already touched on in previous blog posts. In fact, this is a great way to build a larger argument over time.

current news stories on an issue is a great way to convey the complexity of the issue or the growth of a movement and help to motivate readers to get involved.

- **FIRST-PERSON TESTIMONIALS** Sharing your personal story or take on an issue is a great way to let your readers know more about you and personalize your reasons for supporting an issue.
- **GUEST BLOGS** Just because it is your blog does not mean that you have to write it all the time. Sometimes it is useful to host someone else's take on an issue to help grow your reader base and expand your blog's point of view.

## HOW TO GROW YOUR BLOG AUDIENCE

It takes time to grow a blog audience, but here are some key tips to help you have more people reading your thoughts as soon as possible

- **Share your posts on social media. Don't just post a link, but include a question to engage your friends, images related to the blog or other elements to help encourage people to click on your link.**
- **Make it easy for other people to share your blog on social media. Make sure there is easy to see sharing links for all of the social media platforms you want to engage with on every blog.**
- **Use compelling headlines to hook your readers. Headlines are hard to write, but the time it takes to come up with a good one can quickly pay off with more readers.**
- **Use key words in your blog that relate to your issue. These key words will help your post show up in search results and improve the number of new people who are exposed to your writing.**
- **Work with other bloggers. Comment on their posts with links to your own blog when posts you have made are relevant. Ask if you can write a guest post for other bloggers on your issue.**

Inviting a lawmaker to your school is one of the best ways to get them engaged and interested in what your school has to offer students, parents and the community.

### INVITATION LETTER TEMPLATE

Dear [elected official]:

On behalf of the [school name], I am writing to invite you to visit us for a tour of our school when you are in town. [School name] is located at [address], right in the heart of your legislative district, and serves [x-number of] students in grades [grade levels] with a focus on [what your school excels at]. It would be an honor to show you first hand the school's many achievements.

[Explain what makes your school unique and how it best serves the community]

[Share here about your schools achievements, any awards the school or your students/teachers may have achieved, information about your student population is applicable, etc.]

Again, it would be an honor to have you visit [school name]. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you need additional information. I may be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email here.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Name]  
[Title], [School name]

## PLANNING FOR A VISIT

**An effective school visit requires careful planning for how you will engage with an elected official before, during and after the event.**

### BEFORE THE EVENT

- Choose a few potential days for a visit that work well for your school schedule.
- Send an invitation to the legislator's office that includes the date, time, location and type of visit (school tour, event, etc.). Follow up with their scheduler after you send the invitation. Ask their scheduler when you can anticipate a response. Often, legislators' schedules aren't set until one to two weeks in advance.
- Plan the visit in detail and send a copy of the schedule to the legislator's office.
- Consider sending a press release to local media outlets.
- Compile a school fact sheet with impressive information about your school.

### DURING THE VISIT

- Have student ambassadors greet the legislator and accompany them on the tour.
- Consider your school's "why" – why do you exist? How are

you making an impact? Why does your school matter? How does your school affect your community? Address these pressing questions in a simple, compelling "why" story where you tell the legislator exactly why your school matters.

- Create a concrete, simple story that demonstrates what makes your school unique and highlights your key differentiators. Whatever makes you unique, tell your legislator about it using an emotional, person-based story.
- Allow your school's key differentiators to come to life for your visitors by showing them classroom techniques in action or introducing them to students and staff who exemplify these messages.
- Give a compelling overview of your school and tour several classrooms.
- Allow time for Q & A.

### AFTER THE VISIT

- Send a prompt thank you note.
- Share photos on your school's social media and consider sending a press release.
- Invite the legislator to future events at your school.



**C**anvassing a neighborhood by going door-to-door and talking with people one-on-one can be one of the most effective ways to grow a movement.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR CANVASSING

**Canvassing, especially in hot weather can be a grueling experience, but you can make it much easier with proper preparation.**

- Bring bug spray, sunscreen, water and snacks (leave in the car)
- Have your phone charged and/or an external battery
- Wear neutral clothing and weather appropriate, work shirt
- recommended, and comfortable shoes
- If you bring it, you carry it: cell phone, clipboard, materials, ID badge
- Leave purses/computers at home or in your trunk, place in trunk before leaving to the meet-up spot
- Park in a higher traffic area or by somewhere that has cameras
- Practice a 10-second pitch and 30-second elevator pitch

## KEY TERMS

### Door-to-Door

**Canvassing:** Going to homes in a neighborhood to solicit support for a campaign, and/or to distribute information

**Turf:** the area in which you plan to canvass

**Cutting turf:** the process of creating the map in which you choose to canvass

## TIPS FOR SUCCEEDING WHILE CANVASSING

- It's a Federal crime to put a flyer in a mailbox.
- Use the buddy system – always make sure you are visible to your buddy and exchange phone numbers.
- Make sure you have the canvass supervisor's phone number.
- Don't ask if they have time to speak, just give a warm friendly greeting.
- Be sincere and respectful, don't engage in an argument.
- Don't guess or lie, be honest and tell them someone better informed can call them back, (this can be the easiest way to get contact information).
- Gather information i.e. – name, address, email, phone number, always fill out the top line fully on each sheet with "fake info" and fill any additional info omitted throughout the shift with "fake info" and indicate with an asterisk. (When one spot gets left blank the following signers will follow suit)
- Leave a flyer at all doors you knock on and with people you talk to.
- If a cop or business owner stops to ask you what you are doing explain you are NOT soliciting (selling anything) but if asked to leave, do so immediately.
- For support campaigns: Take as much as time as needed per door, it's about relationship building.
- For signature campaigns: Keep it moving.
- Don't knock on doors that say "no solicitors," "no trespassing" or "beware of dogs."
- If there is anything that makes you uncomfortable, let your buddy know, leave right away and report to your canvassing supervisor.

**If interested and have lots of questions** get their information and tell them someone will call to follow up.

**Not interested** – "Thank you for your time. Can I leave you a flyer to pass along to someone who might be interested? Have a great day."