

## Letters to the Editor – A “How To” Guide

Letters to the editor are extremely effective way to repeat our message. Here are the basic principles of a good letter:

- **Repeat the primary message.** The goal is to repeat our central message – that people have a right to breathe smoke-free air – not to argue with critics.
- **Stay positive.** Don’t attack or respond to attacks. Acknowledge an attack only as a vehicle to repeat our positive message.
- **Keep them short.** Many daily newspapers have a 250-word limit. That’s a pretty good guide for all letters as that’s about as much as readers will digest in a letter to the editor.
- **Keep it as local as possible.** Refer to the local situation instead of using statewide statistics on tobacco. For example, use local statistics if you have them. The author should be local – and any references to local people or groups is an effective way to ensure papers will use your letter.
- **Short paragraphs.** You may not have noticed, but newspapers use one and two sentence paragraphs. They do this because the columns are narrow. Large paragraphs turn into large blocks of gray type.
- **Write simply.** Write as you speak. Write a draft off the top of your head just as you would thank someone in person. Walk away. Reread it later. Edit it and send it in.
- **Just do it. Encourage others.** The most difficult part of letter writing is getting it done and sent into the paper. Letters not written do not get in the paper. Get it done. Send it in.

## Framework for a Letter to the Editor

**Start your letter with an attention-grabbing first line:** It's time to clear the air for all workers.

What's your first line?

**Refer to the issue, story, editorial, or previous letter:** I "ditto" the recent editorial calling for a comprehensive statewide smoke-free air law.

How will you refer to the issue, story, editorial, or previous letter?

**Present the problem and solution:** Comprehensive smoke-free laws are the only way to protect ALL workers from the serious health effects of secondhand smoke.

What will you say about the problem and solution?

**Insert a personal story:** I grew up in my parent's supper club where I had daily heavy exposure to secondhand smoke. I have severe asthma that my doctor believes was caused by secondhand smoke.

Do you have a personal story to tell?

**End the Letter by Repeating the Solution or Your Call to Action:** A smoke-free state law that covers all worksites is the only way to protect all workers from secondhand smoke.

How will you end the letter by either repeating the solution or making a call to action?