

Guide to writing to your local paper

Letters in your local paper are an effective way of initiating debate, debunking myths, promoting the good of cycling and also increasing awareness of your local campaign group.

While submitting a letter does not guarantee publication, there are a number of things you can do to help your point stand out.

Cycling UK's top tips:

1. Know your publication

It should go without saying that you will stand a much better chance of publication if you are familiar with the paper you're trying to publish in, its audience and the type of letters it publishes already. While there will be a generic address to submit your letter to, if you can find out who edits the Letters Page, try to make contact directly.

If you're a local campaigner, make an introduction to the editor explaining who you represent when you submit your first letter, and if your letters are up to scratch, then you may well find in the future you're approached to talk about particular issues.

2. Be topical

It's often easier to see your letter in print if you're responding to an article, comment piece or other letter that has already been published. Make sure to reference this in your own letter. Likewise, if there's an issue we're all facing, whether that's the environment, a pandemic, road safety or anything else, there can often be a justifiable interest for publishing your thoughts too.

3. Be timely

If you're responding to an issue as per the above, make sure you do so in a timely matter. It's no good writing a letter that is addressing points made a fortnight ago in the paper, or talking about an issue that is no longer current. News moves on.

4. Be local

This is your local paper – they want your thoughts on what is relevant to the patch they cover and where you live.

5. Be concise

The Times is notoriously strict on the length and format of the letters it publishes, and while your local paper might not be so rigid, it pays to take some lessons from the nationals. This means be concise – aim to write no more than 250 words (for The Times – it's much less). Space can be at a premium in papers, so you're much more likely to be published if you make your point in fewer words - not to mention more powerful in your message.

6. Be to the point

Make one point in your letter – not several. This doesn't just help you remain concise, but also maintains focus on the issue at hand.

7. Be truthful

Don't lie in your letter or generalise – back up your point with facts. Cycling UK's [briefings](#) and [statistics](#) pages will often have everything you need.

8. Be persistent

A failure to be published does not mean you won't ever be published. Letter writing is an art, and takes time to perfect – and even then you're not guaranteed publication, so keep at it!

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