

## [ Writing Letters to the Editor ]

Writing a Letter to the Editor (LttE) is not only a time-honored way of asserting one's First Amendment rights, it is an efficient way of affecting public opinion and the public policy decisions that our elected officials make. Although any area addressed in the media is likely to elicit a letter from a reader or viewer who wishes to lodge a complaint or proffer an opinion, alcohol, other drug, and violence (AODV) issues in higher education are certainly among the more appropriate topics for a LttE.

In order to increase the likelihood that readers of this Network brochure in the Making a Difference series will voice their opinions on AODV issues, the following suggestions are presented for your consideration as you pen your personal LttE.

By way of beginning this list of suggestions, reflect on the following: It takes time to write a letter to the editor and not all letters that are written and sent to a particular publication will be published. This said, when a letter is published it is viewed as not only suggestive of the opinion of the one individual who wrote it, but likely representative of the opinion of "a number" of people in the community. So to take the time to write will likely have a greater impact on public opinion and the opinion of those who monitor public opinion - your elected officials - than you may at first realize .



### About The Network

The Network is the national organization that proactively addresses the issues of alcohol, other drugs, and violence in order to promote healthy campus environments through self-regulatory initiatives, information dissemination, and technical assistance. Member institutions encourage and enhance local, state, regional, and national initiatives through a commitment to shared standards for policy development, educational strategies, enforcement, evaluation, and community collaboration.

making a  
*Difference*

**THE Network**  
ADDRESSING COLLEGIATE  
ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ISSUES  
<http://thenetwork.ws>

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The Network Presents...

# Expressing Opinions in Letters to the Editor

**Guest author,  
Robert J. Chapman, PhD  
Drexel University**

**A publication in the  
Making A Difference series**

# To increase the likelihood that your letter will be published, mull over the following:

**1. Shorter is better. Focus your comments and stick to a single issue.**

**2. Be courteous and civil in your tone and words. Good taste is not just for conversations with your mom and respect is not just one of Aretha Franklin's best Motown hits.**

**3. You are competing with many other letter writers for limited space. Make your letter compelling and one of the letters editor will want to publish.**

- Because letters editors will always want to check the authenticity of the submitted letter, make this task easier—put your full first and last name, address, phone and/or fax numbers (day and evening) and your e-mail address at the top of the letter.
- Cite the previously published story, article, advertisement, or “whatever” that is the focus of your letter. Include the date and for TV/radio programs, the time/program. By doing this you make it easier for the letters editor to check the facts related to your issue of concern .
- Keep your sentences short; write 3, no more than 4 to a paragraph, and a limit the number of paragraphs as well.
- Clever writing will be appreciated. Irony and a sense of humor will increase the likelihood of publication; tasteless jokes are the “kiss of death.”
- Watch the use of clichés or puns. These suggest a lazy writer and will often mark your letter for obscurity.
- Your opinion is yours and the LtE section of the paper is a place to express them, but do not attack the author of a previous article or its publisher. Try and further the discussion of the topic by presenting a competing point of view that may entice others to write and participate in the discussion.
- If you have personal experience regarding the topic of your letter, state this clearly. Letters editors like to publish missives written in the first person that offer personal perspectives on a topic of solutions based in experience.
- If your letter is deemed appropriate for publication, but too long, your last paragraphs are the most likely to be cut. Do not save your best point for the closing of your letter.
- Write one letter to one paper or publisher. If you would like to express the same opinion in a variety of media, make each an original.
- If you write a letter every week, you will quickly find yourself on a list of those to be excluded from consideration. A few letters a year to the same paper or TV/radio station is sufficient. If you would like to write more, stagger the recipients of your letters this week the local paper, next week the USA Today, etc.



**4. Keep it brief... as the old saying goes, “less is more.”**