

Tips for Writing Letters to Editors

Purpose of writing a letter to the editor.

The purpose of writing a letter to the editor is to educate the public about the impacts of clearcutting on water, climate change and fire risk and about the importance of banning clearcutting in California.

Pick a publication and follow its directions for submitting letters to the editor.

Choose local or national publications that you read or know reasonably well. If writing to a local publication, it may help to be a resident of the circulation area. Most publications have an online process for submitting letters to the editor. They may ask for your name, address, email address, phone number and other information such as your vocation or title. They will state a maximum word count. Editors like to know what motivates your interest so don't hesitate to say you are concerned about the drought or climate change. Your letter may be edited or shortened before it is printed, if it is chosen for publication.

Look for an article which you can relate to clearcutting.

Your letter will be more apt to be published if it responds to an article that was just published. Be sure to refer to the article you are responding to. The article doesn't need to be specifically about clearcutting but the topic needs to be something that you can relate to clearcutting such as forests, water, climate change, fire. Draw a link between the article and the need to stop clearcutting in California. You will find some possible links at <http://www.stopclearcuttingca.org/about-clearcutting/whats-wrong-with-clearcutting/>.

Choose an approach that addresses the issue.

There are a variety of approaches you can take to your topic. You can refute information or opinions in the published articles or you can support them. You can make a call to action. You can also suggest sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to problems or harmful practices. Additional information about the topic, not mentioned in the original piece, will strengthen your argument. Check your facts and state your sources, if you have them. Also state your credentials if they are relevant to the topic.

You can also write letters about forest clearcutting that you believe deserve attention or point out local information or issues of concern that relate to coverage in the publication.

Be timely and sincere.

Respond within a few days to articles that appear in the paper, especially prominent articles or editorial page opinions. It's important to be timely. State your opinion clearly and concisely at the beginning of the letter. Then flush out the statement with further information or opinion

that supports your position. Be clear and direct. Use your own words and opinions. Don't exceed the stated word count.

Monitor the publication to see the result.

Once you've submitted your letter, you may have to monitor the publication's letters-to-the-editor section to learn whether or not it was published. If you are responding to a recent article or timely topic, there is a short time frame in which your letter is likely to appear, if it is published. Don't be discouraged if it isn't published. There is always competition for limited space. If the letter is printed, monitor for a few weeks afterwards to see if anyone responds to your letter. If there is a reaction to your letter, feel free to counter it with a second letter. *

*This information includes ideas from the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Blue Dot Campaign of the David Suzuki Foundation as well as the experience of the authors.