

# TIPS for writing effective Letters to the Editors (Thanks CCL for this resource!)

## The Importance of Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are important tools for the following reasons:

- **Newsworthy.** The newspaper prints letters it considers “newsworthy” and important in the community—therefore if our representatives see LTE’s in the paper, they know it is important and newsworthy.
- **Volume.** The volume of letters submitted indicates the communities’ level of interest in the topic.
- **Pulse.** Legislators use letters to the editor to get a “pulse” of what’s happening in the district
- **Visibility.**

## To which stories or opinion pieces should I respond?

Finding the right story or opinion piece doesn’t just mean one with a relevant topic. We also need to consider what the **newspaper feels is newsworthy** (e.g. a front page story is more relevant than one buried deep in the paper). Possible ranking of importance of articles to respond to:

- Editorials and front-page news
- Staff-written columns (i.e. by the newspaper’s own columnist)
- Locally-written op-eds
- Inside news stories
- Editorial cartoons
- Other letters to the editor

## How do I write a letter to the editor?

The “LTE Formula” (below) will increase your chances of getting published, but you should review letters that have been published in that newspaper to get a feel for the format that is used:

- **Reference** the story or a specific part (line, thought, etc.) of the story. A short reference praising the writer or paper works well.
- **Transition** into how it relates to climate change / clean energy / HB3470
- **Identify** a solution. (HB3470)
- Present a **call to action**.
- **Close creatively** by employing a rhetorical device such as repetition, a play on words or closing the circle from the letter’s beginning.
- Always be respectful.

**What should I say? What should I avoid?** (Topics, etiquette, and protocol for writing LTEs):

- **Timing is important.** The sooner you submit a letter in response to a story or an opinion piece, the more likely it will be published.
- **Refrain from demonizing** others and **Always be respectful**
- **Try not to lecture**, write conversationally and without a lot of jargon.
- **Mentioning your senator and representative by name** can be very effective, especially if you espouse the values that resonate with that particular office or his/her constituents (e.g. for conservatives: accountability, liberty, job creation, economic development, for liberals: environment, social justice, fairness, etc.).
- **Lead with the solutions and benefits of transitioning to cleaner energy and greater energy efficiency.**
- Use dire warnings of climate doom judiciously and **ALWAYS** couple warnings with a solution.

## EXAMPLES from the Citizens Climate Lobby

### Putting the LTE Formula to practice

Example 1: Read this story .

Here's the actual letter parsed into elements of the LTE Formula:

1. **Reference the story:** Thanks for Craig Pittman's informative article on high tides getting higher and threatening businesses, homes and infrastructure while raising everyone's flood insurance rates. Gov. Rick Scott isn't so sure about man-made climate change.
2. **The transition into climate change:** One would think the governor of Florida, where 95 percent of the population lives within 35 miles of the coast, would nonetheless take out climate change insurance to protect his state. Climate change insurance means doing what the vast majority of scientists and economists say to do to slow climate change, even if the governor isn't 100 percent sure it is happening. That is what insurance means: When there is uncertainty, buy protection. The vast majority of scientists say greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from fossil fuel use, are the cause of climate change. So climate insurance would entail lowering these emissions.
3. **Identify the solution and call to action:** Moreover, the vast majority of scientists and economists say the best way to lower emissions is with a national, revenue-neutral carbon tax that would reduce emissions in all sectors of our economy efficiently and equitably. If Congress requires that the tax be rebated to households, then consumers can be protected from price increases.
4. **Close (closing the loop example):** And if costs go up a little bit, consider it a small price to pay to protect your house, business, land, food supply, water supply and your families' lives.

Example 2: The second example is a bit more subtle in its call to action; however, it espouses the values that resonate in the district. Read the story [here](#).

Here's the actual letter parsed into elements of the LTE Formula

1. **Reference the story:** Joe Barnes and James Coan quite accurately describe the global nature of the oil market and why domestic oil production has only a modest impact on prices. Indeed, while there is much government tinkering on the cost side of oil production, oil prices are determined by the free market in almost its purest form. No wonder the oil industry is at home in freedom-loving Texas!
2. **Transition to climate change:** Unfortunately, this is only half of the story. Good conservative Texans believe in accountability and paying one's own way. However, we consumers aren't currently being asked to pay for the costs that our greenhouse gas emissions are causing society. The reality is, we are paying for those impacts – but instead of making it transparent and efficient by tagging it onto the price of gasoline, it's costing us through an overburdened federal government in the form of [FEMA](#) payouts, increased highway maintenance and farmer drought assistance.
3. **Present a call to action/identify solution:** That's hardly conservatism. Although domestic oil production is, as the essay notes, a good thing in the immediate term, it is becoming ever more apparent that ignoring the externalities of its use is perhaps the greatest failure in the history of the free market.
4. **Close (closing the loop example):** And that's true for oil drilled here or overseas.