



The Center for Victims of Torture Tips on Writing Letters to the Editor

The three most important things to remember when writing letters to the editor are:

1. **Be brief.** Try and keep your letter to 200 words or less (150 or less is even better).
2. **Be timely.** Editors like to publish concise letters that respond to an article, editorial or letter that appeared in their newspaper. The quicker you respond, the better chance you have of being published.
3. **Include your contact information.** Most papers won't run your letter if you don't include your name, address and phone number. Many papers will call to confirm that you actually sent the letter before running it.

Other tips:

Mention an article, editorial or previous letter printed in the paper. This will increase your chances of getting published. The stronger the tie-in the better, but most articles or editorials on torture, terrorism, human rights, detainees, prisoners of war, Iraq, and similar topics will give you many possible "tie-ins".

Stick to one main point. You don't have many words, and it is better to use them to make one strong point than several weak ones.

Try to appear fair and moderate. Try and appeal to the "average", moderate reader. After all, they are the ones you have the best chance of swaying with your letter.

Look for a local angle if possible. Papers like to focus on news that affects the local or regional area.

Use short sentences. Short sentences are easier for the reader to read, and for the editor to cut (if necessary).

Try to write a strong opening. Grab the reader's attention right up front by letting them know what your topic is and why it is important to you.

Send letters by email if possible. Many papers accept letters via fax, email and U.S. mail. Check on your paper's website, or give them a call. It's also OK to follow up with a phone call to make sure your letter got to the right person.

Don't forget your smaller community newspapers. It is much easier to get your letters printed in these smaller newspapers and they reach important audiences as well.



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Sample letter (178 words)

Dear Editor,

As a practicing healthcare worker, I know that wars aren't over when the fighting stops. The pain goes on. Wounds don't heal. Memories don't die. Of all the atrocities committed in war, one of the worst is torture because it attacks not only the body, but also the mind and spirit of the victims.

Based on the response of the American public to reports of torture, it is clear the vast majority of Americans expect better of our government. They know that torture is un-American. It threatens our troops, our reputation, and corrupts our society.

Sen. John McCain, a Vietnam POW, proposed an amendment that would require all military personnel meet the minimum standards of conduct outlined in the U.S. Army Field Manual on Interrogations. The field manual clearly prohibits torture. Now is the time to act. Please ask your senators to support the McCain amendment. And tell them to apply to Army Field Manual to all U.S. personnel, including the CIA. If we don't stand against torture, who will?

Sincerely,

(Your Name and Contact Information)



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Sample letter (197 words)

Dear Editor,

So far, only a few enlisted men and women have been charged for the acts of torture and abuse committed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. Yet their offenses have had a tremendous national impact. In an Open Letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee, twelve distinguished U.S. generals and admirals wrote, “Today, it is clear that these operations have fostered greater animosity toward the United States, undermined our intelligence gathering efforts, and added to the risks facing our troops serving around the world.”

These military leaders reminded us, “The United State’s commitment to the Geneva Conventions – the laws of war – flows not only from field experience, but also from the moral principles on which this country was founded, and by which we all continue to be guided.”

I want to know who is guiding our troops – and I want to know what are they are saying. America deserves better. Our troops deserve better. Please join me in asking your representatives in Washington to establish an independent commission to investigate all reports of torture, including all cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by U.S. personnel.

If we don’t stand against torture, who will?

Sincerely,

(Your Name and Contact Information)