

# Tips for UCubed Jobs Activists: Writing Letters to the Editor

## **Keep it short.**

Letters should be four or five paragraphs long, tops, with one or two sentences per paragraph.

Newspapers have the right to edit letters and a long letter invites them to do so. Editing can alter the meaning or thrust of your letter.

## **Stick to the point.**

Each paragraph should make one point. Don't try to respond to every point made by the offending article or editorial. Use the letter to present your best case to the readers. Readers won't remember all the details of the original article, anyway.

## **Keep it timely.**

Write the newspaper about an article, issue or event the same day that it catches your attention, while the issue is fresh in the public's (and the editor's) mind.

Newspapers get lots of mail, and nothing's more stale than old news. Letters that arrive four or five days after the fact may be bumped by others, or be seen as irrelevant.

## **Don't attack the newspaper / Don't act like a crackpot.**

If you attack a newspaper for being anti-jobless, or biased or stupid, they won't print your letter. And the goal is to get your letter printed for the public to read. There are more diplomatic ways to criticize the press.

Angry, name-calling letters turn off the readers. They're fun to write, but they make you sound hysterical and unstable. A patient, reasonable tone, using a bit of humor if possible, makes you sound much more credible.

## **Letters should be signed, with your address, phone number**

Newspapers won't print them otherwise, and rightly so. Editors must be able to verify that the letter actually came from you and reflects your beliefs.

Find out the ground rules before sending letters to your newspaper. (There's usually a boxed policy statement on the editorial or letters page.)

## **When an issue is hot, flood 'em with letters.**

Tons of mail proves an issue is big in the public's mind and makes it likely that some letters representing your side will be printed. Newspapers are sensitive to public opinion. Avoid mimeographing or mailing-in hundreds of identical letters signed by different people. That smacks of a set-up. Individual letters work much better.