

Should You Write a Letter to the Editor?

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Many activists over the years have suggested to their respective audiences that one of the things they can do to be “engaged” and “active” in the political arena is to [write a letter to the editor of a newspaper](#). Interestingly, they do so flippantly, never evaluating the effectiveness of such a method. Unfortunately, the truth in many situations, such as this one, is quite nuanced.

A wide-spread assumption within various dissident circles is that it is still desirable to use the [mainstream media](#) to our advantage, in much the same way a guerrilla feeds off the captured supplies of his imperial enemy. The real question though is, just how effective is this guerrilla infowar tactic? Realize first that there is a very low probability that any letter you write to the editor will end up getting published; and second, even if the paper in question has a pretty wide circulation, how do you measure how many people actually read it?



Any sort of market feedback is more accurate and reliable in the [alternative media](#) than anything the *lame-stream* dinosaur talking bobble heads can provide to you. Modern self-publishing technology now guarantee the availability of the tools needed to exercise the use of the proverbial soapbox, whereas letters to the editor are simply asking for permission to speak. Does only concentrating on activities like [blogging](#), podcasting, and videography unnecessarily limit yourself to a niche market? Sure it *possibly* can, but at least you know the numbers of hits and views; even then, it is still open for your detractors to comment, unlike the corporate whore papers.

There are also the privacy implications to consider. [Benjamin Franklin was able to write letters to the editor](#) of the *New England Courant* under the alias Silence Dogood, thereby portraying himself as a very opinionated widow, yet he was never once asked “Your papers, please!” [James Wesley Rawles has recommended people to use an pseudonym](#) when writing letters to the editor, since he is concerned about [INFOSEC](#). So, you would think it is relatively easy to do so, given both these historical and contemporary examples, *right?*

Sadly, such is not at all the case here. Just by concentrating on a smattering of local newspapers here in Austin (as well as different local newspapers in other cities that served as a type of control group), I was able to determine that it is literally impossible to “anonymously” write anything to the editor and expect a fair gamble at getting it published. Granted, papers *are* free to publish whatever letters they receive, but what I object to here is the constant “policy” of them either demanding some combination of your legal name, physical or mailing address, and/or telephone number before you are allowed to submit your letter for potential publication, or asking you for these details *after* they’ve made the decision to publish your letter, yet still make it only a conditional acceptance as such (depending on the individual newspaper).

If you think I am overreacting to this overtly corporatist behavior, consider [what happened to Michael Kuzman back in 1981](#). He wrote a letter to the editor of a local paper expressing his personal views about (what some would think of as) a controversial political topic. As a direct result of the publication of his letter, the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS conducted a 4 day surveillance operation on Mr. Kuzman and his family. What crime was he suspected of committing? We will probably never know for sure, but what is crystal clear here is that writing a letter to the editor, especially in the context of exercising *political* speech (which was supposed

to be legally protected by the First Amendment), makes you a target for political persecution, hence the need to be able to publish anonymously, which the mainstream media has now made it virtually impossible to do. Welcome to police state America.

Probably a nearly untouched upon aspect regarding the validity of writing a letter to the editor is, what exactly is the goal here? Is it to win over hearts and minds? Is it a naïve attempt to *somehow* “recruit” people to join your particular organization? Or is it simply an opportunity for self-aggrandizement? Comparing this with [writing your congressman](#), consider the respective audiences: congressional staff members who shoot back out a standardized form letter, or random people who in all probability are least apathetic, if not outright hostile, to what you have to say. True, those random people are a noticeably larger sampling than just a few congressional staff aides, but at least you can determine the results of such letters (that is, how the congressman voted on particular bills versus pretty much nothing at all). I am not implying anything statist here; I am simply pointing out that the feedback for the government version is much more reliable and accurate than the corporatist flavor (and most importantly, the free market alternative media has the best feedback of all, thus vastly surpassing the other two).

During [the constitutional ratification period of the late 1780s](#), Americans had a reason to care about what was happening around them. They had just won a bloody 7 year war for their independence in order to try something distinctly new, and they didn't want to leave to chance anything that could bollocks it all up. It was at this pivotal time in American history that letters to the editor framed the public discourse, thus determining in many ways how the delegates to the state conventions were to vote on ratification of the federal Constitution. An anthology of these letters in favor of the Constitution were collectively published as [The Federalist Papers](#) (it wasn't until much later that those letters published at the time in various newspapers critical of the Constitution were somewhat haphazardly compiled into what eventually became known as [The Anti-Federalist Papers](#)). Seeing that such aliases as “Publius” and “Federal Farmer” were used, I sincerely doubt *those* writers were obliged to reveal their personal identities as a condition of actual (or even likely) publication.

We have lost something very precious to the American experience, that is, the ability to use pen names in writing letters to the editor in order to express politically controversial thoughts. Thankfully, we have [the Internet](#) as a tool with which to exercise our liberty of free speech, but we shouldn't have had to rely on it so much. It doesn't negate the fact that the incessant “policy” of the media corporatocracy is to elicit from us our “real” identities as a precondition for publication; such information is, of course, used for profitable data-mining purposes (contrary to what their alleged “privacy policies” may ostensibly say).

So, what can be done as an alternative to writing letters to the editor of a corporatist publication? You could do what many people in the alternative media did back in the '90s before the Internet went big and write a letter to the editor of a *newsletter* (such as the former [American Sentinel](#) or [Sobran's](#)). Another option is to treat those editors the same as congressman and simply mail them brightly colored postcards; since it is now common for there to be word limits, you might as well take advantage of the situation and act in accordance with it, for you will not be granted the *privilege* of writing even half the length of Agrippa's letters. I also recommend [writing your own book reports](#) exposing the evils of [the Establishment](#), and this can be accomplished by posting them on discussion forum boards, by blogging, or even by [micro-blogging](#).

Thomas Jefferson once said, [“I'd rather have newspapers and no government, than government and no newspapers.”](#) While I can appreciate the sentiment, I think even he could understand why I cannot agree with his preference for my own nuanced reasons. At this juncture, I would rather bypass these newspapers (and even the Internet, to some degree) by giving people who live near me locally some literature and allowing them to “convert” themselves, instead of [“debating”](#) with them using the soapbox. The [Carnival of Distractions](#) has wrought enough damage by wasting valuable human time and energy into ineffective and

even counter-productive tasks. I think it is high time for my fellow bloggers to expose them for their misdeeds by [writing audio timelines](#), thereby documenting their foolish talk for those who bother to *read!* Hopefully, by demonstrating the foolishness of such techniques like writing congressmen or editors much of anything, we can then regroup and begin to ascertain how to more effectively secure our Liberties.