

Letters to editor

Selling Your Work · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

Letters to the editor from journalists

It's good that journalists, like any other citizens, write letters to newspapers.

But I must point out something very firmly. Getting a letter published is not any indication of writing ability.

A letter is published for many reasons.

The letter makes a point. Or it's timely, or angry, or informational, or maybe to balance the for-and-against letters.

Good writing is not a criterion for getting a letter published. When your letter is competing against other letters, the editor does not select the published letters because they are the "best written" ones.

If you had 10 letters a week published every week in various publications, this would not indicate whether you can be a successful freelance journalist.

A letter is simply one person's viewpoint.

An article is a result of journalistic research, journalistic interviewing, journalistic work such as follow-up phone calls and then finally journalistic writing, aimed at a target journalistic publication.

I have about six or eight letters a year published, mostly in The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian. I too get a kick out of it, and am pleased that other people get to read my personal viewpoint.

But I NEVER consider this to be some form of journalism, because it's not.

Anyone can write a letter to the editor and get it published, even if it's written in a dull and uninteresting way.

So, please, keep writing letters to editors, but don't mix-up this activity in your head with what you and I both care about professionally: journalism.

Some aspiring journalists mistakenly think that getting lots of letters published will drive their name into the brain of the editor . . . yes it might, but as letter-writer, not as a journalist.

Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit simontownsendjournalist.com for the full archive.