

Write Your Story

A Guide to Sharing Your Experience and Influencing Change

Your story matters. You don't have to be a public speaker or a professional writer to make an impact; your lived experience is powerful on its own. Whether you're a person with a disability, a parent, or a family member, sharing your journey can move people to action, spark important conversations, attract allies, and influence the policymakers who shape the systems you navigate every day.

Written stories can travel far. Letters to the editor remain among the most widely read features in any newspaper. Social media posts, blogs, and e-newsletters can reach thousands. And a heartfelt note, especially one with a personal photograph, can land on a decision-maker's desk and never be forgotten.

How to Write Your Story

Good advocacy writing doesn't require a journalism degree. Here are some simple principles to keep in mind:

- **Lead with your most important point.** Readers, like legislators and editors, are busy. Don't make them dig for what matters most.
- **Don't assume background knowledge.** Write as if your reader is hearing about this issue for the first time.
- **Use everyday language.** Avoid jargon, acronyms, and clinical terms unless you explain them.
- **Stick to what you know.** Your personal experience is your credibility; don't exaggerate or speculate beyond it.
- **Be specific.** Concrete details (names, dates, places, dollar amounts) are more persuasive than generalizations.
- **End with a clear ask.** What do you want the reader to do, think, or support? Don't beat around the bush. Say it plainly.

PRO-TIP

A Personal Touch Makes the Difference!



Words are powerful, but a photograph and a handwritten note can make your story unforgettable.

When you send a letter to a legislator, editor, or community leader, consider including:

- A photo of yourself, your child, or your family — something real and personal that puts a face to your words.
- A brief handwritten note alongside your typed letter. Even just a sentence or two in your own handwriting signals this isn't a form letter. It came from you.
- Legislative staffers and editors receive hundreds of emails and printed letters. A photo and a personal note make yours stand out, and make it much harder to set aside.

Where to Share Your Story

The right platform depends on your audience and your comfort level. Here are your main options:

- **Letters to the editor** are among the most-read sections of any newspaper — and legislators pay close attention to them. Most papers accept submissions online and have word limits around 150–250 words.
- **Social media** (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter) lets you reach your own network quickly, especially with a photo. Use hashtags relevant to disability rights or your specific issue to expand your reach.
- **Blogs and e-newsletters** allow for longer, more personal storytelling. They're great for building an ongoing relationship with readers who want to follow your journey.
- **Direct mail to legislators**, especially with a photo and handwritten note, can be extraordinarily impactful. Physical mail stands out in a world of digital communication

PRO-TIP

Research before you submit. Each news outlet has its own style guidelines, word limits, and submission process. Do a little homework before sending.



Build Relationships

Advocacy is more effective when it's built on relationships. Get to know the journalists who cover personal stories, health policy, and disability issues, follow their work, share it, and engage with it. When you reach out, be responsive to questions and follow-up. Reporters are much more likely to seek out voices they trust and have worked with before.

Find Collaborators

Your story is more powerful when it's part of a chorus. Consider coordinating with others to send letters to the editor around the same time, especially when a relevant issue is in the news. Editors typically publish a selection of the pieces they receive, and the more submissions that support a particular idea, the more likely that idea is to get covered. Even unpublished letters can influence which ones make it to print.

PRO-TIP

Reach out to other families, advocates, and organizations you're connected with. A coordinated campaign, even a small one, carries more weight than a single letter.



Amplify Your Work

Once your piece is published, or even after you've sent it, don't let it stop there:

- **Share your published piece** on your personal social media pages and in relevant groups and communities.
- **Send clippings** (real or digital) to your state and federal legislators. A physical clipping mailed with a handwritten note is especially memorable.
- **Tag your legislators** in social posts. Many have staff who monitor mentions and report back on constituent feedback

Think Small, Too

Big media placements are great, but don't underestimate the power of a short post. Tweets, Instagram photos with captions, and brief Facebook updates all get your message out. A well-chosen photo with a few sentences of personal context can reach your network quickly and be shared widely.

Hashtags and taglines are great tools for connecting your story to a larger conversation — and for helping new audiences find you.

PRO-TIP

Your story is worth telling. We're here to help you tell it.

