

## Tools for Advocating to the Media

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Most Americans' perceptions of the Middle East conflict come from the mass media. Some media – especially large-circulation daily newspapers, network television and wire services – have correspondents based in Israel and continue to devote considerable attention to the Mideast. This is not surprising considering the intensive U.S. involvement in the peace process, America's substantial interests in the region, and the continuing strong ties between the U.S. and Israel. As the only democracy in the region with a vibrant free press, Israel is open to foreign journalists.

The news media obviously plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of the conflict, and it goes without saying that effective advocacy on behalf of Israel includes an assessment of the daily stream of news coverage from the region. There are some things you can do to become an active participant in this process:

- Read your local newspaper every day
- Know the facts and history
- Pay attention to news coverage of the Middle East, and Israel in particular
- Get involved: Respond to coverage that is unfairly critical of Israel

### **Assessing Media Coverage**

Newspapers and news magazines offer a variety of forums for news and analysis. Breaking news (or “straight news”) stories are usually written on the scene and describe events currently taking place in the region. News stories are quite

different from columns, editorials, and op-eds, which generally express an opinion or offer a certain viewpoint. Understanding this difference is essential.

Generally, news articles aim to present the story from a balanced perspective, meaning that more than one point of view is represented. The professional journalists who report news stories strive to uphold their profession's standards of accuracy, fairness and balance. However, there are times when news reports on Israel may contain inaccuracies or overlook a critical piece of information that is necessary to put the story in context. While such oversights are often unintentional, they do merit a response.

Often you will see op-eds, editorials and columns that are critical of Israeli policies and/or leadership. The most effective and immediate response is a letter to the editor, and/or a brief comment in the publication's online comment section (often on the same page as the article itself). Tips for submitting an effective letter to the editor are outlined below.

If you suspect a news story misrepresents facts or contains an error, it is important to review the item carefully and check your facts before drafting a letter to the editor in response.

National and local Jewish organizations can help you to assess the accuracy of a news story and determine the most appropriate course of action.

## **Letters to the Editor & ONLINE COMMENT SECTIONS**

Letters to the editor and online comment sections offer effective vehicles for responding to news articles, op-eds and editorials in newspapers, magazines and news Web sites. A few things to bear in mind:

- Letters must be timely. Allowing a week, or even a few days to pass before responding to an article will greatly diminish the likelihood of your letter appearing online or in the print edition.

- Write in response to a particular news item, editorial or op-ed. Newspapers and magazines are not interested in letters that do not address a story or issue discussed in their pages. In your letter, make specific reference to the story's headline and the date it appeared. Most newspapers/news sites offer online comment sections where you can allow your voice to immediately be heard.
- Be brief and address a specific issue. Newspapers generally will not publish lengthy letters that go into the entire history or background of an issue. Many only accept letters for publication of 250 words or less. Be succinct, brief and as "to the point" as possible. Review the publication's instructions for submitting a letter to the editor.
- Be civil. Do not personally attack the writer. If responding to an opinion column or op-ed, you may refer in your letter to the writer by name, indicate that you disagree with his or her point of view, and explain why.
- Be sure to include your name, address and a daytime telephone number. With the exception of online comment boards, most newspapers will not accept anonymous letters; most will not publish a letter without first attempting to check the identity of the author.
- Send your letter by e-mail, or use the online comment form. When using e-mail, direct the letter to the appropriate address for letters. Do not use multiple addresses, or copy others. This will diminish your chances of being published. In addition to writing a letter for publication, you may submit a comment on the publication's Web site, where it will appear immediately.
- Do not sign on to mass letters or organized campaigns: Newspapers do not appreciate mass letter-writing campaigns that flood their in-boxes with nearly identical messages. Make your response unique and your own.
- Check ADL's [Media Watch](#) to see ADL's responses to recent issues in the news.

Many newspapers, network news outlets, and some Internet news sites have a designated ombudsman or “reader’s advocate” – a staff member whose job is to address specific grievances of readers. If you feel strongly that a certain writer or columnist continues to unfairly portray the issues or facts with regard to Israel, or see a pattern of unfair anti-Israel bias in the publication’s coverage, a letter to the ombudsman may be another effective route.

### **Israel in the blogosphere**

Another battleground for perceptions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the blogosphere, which in recent years has grown tremendously as bloggers of every political persuasion have taken to commenting on political and news developments in the Middle East.

It is generally counterproductive to respond directly to anti-Israel bloggers or Web sites. And it is simply not possible to respond to every anti-Israel blog. If you read something you disagree with, the best course of action may be to simply ignore it. If the blogger is someone who is well-known or respected, such as a political figure, pundit, celebrity or journalist, you should consider posting your own response on the blog itself. You may want to notify ADL so that we can review the posting and also consider responding in kind.

### **Social-Networking Sites**

Social-networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others offer an unprecedented opportunity for direct engagement with others on the issues of the day. Share articles with your friends, family and acquaintances that reflect positively on Israel. Numerous Israeli government entities along with pro-Israel groups have an effective and timely social media presence.

Keep in mind that social-networking sites also offer fertile ground for abuses and spreading of misinformation, and there are as many anti-Israel pages and profiles in cyberspace as there are pro-Israeli pages. Most, however, present legitimate

expressions of opinion about the conflict. Also keep in mind that just as you might not attend an anti-Israel rally in the real world, it may be best not to engage directly with anti-Israel activists in cyberspace.

## **A note about Internet rumors and e-mail forwards**

Every year, ADL receives dozens of e-mail message forwards from supporters of Israel asking “Is this true?” These messages often contain unverified or more often simply false rumors about anti-Israel actions, proposed boycotts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or other issues pertaining to the Jewish state and people.

Unfortunately, the more these messages are forwarded without verification, the more havoc they can cause. In recent years some unfounded rumors, spread virally, have spiraled out of control, causing damage to the reputations of companies and individuals.

We urge supporters of Israel to always check the accuracy of any e-mail message before forwarding it on to others. If you are unable to find accurate information on an issue you receive an e-mail about, send the message to ADL for review. We will try and respond promptly. And always check the League’s [Internet Rumors section](#) to see if we have posted information.