



## Writing and Placing an Op-ed

An op-ed is an article that appears opposite the editorial page of local, state and national newspapers written by local citizens, experts, leaders of organizations – people like you. They are a powerful way for your organization to educate a large audience about your issues and to influence policymakers.

### Writing an Op-Ed

Op-eds should be informative and provide practical solutions to the problem presented. They should thought-provoking and inspire discussion and response.

The basic structure is:

- Lead (Personal stories and provocative or counterintuitive statements are most powerful.)
- Thesis
- Argument (based on evidence such as stats, scholarship or first-hand experience)
  - 1<sup>st</sup> point (lay out evidence and then form a conclusion)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> point (lay out evidence and then form a conclusion)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> point (lay out evidence ant then form a conclusion)
- Paragraph addressing potential counter-arguments or critics
- Conclusion

Some tips to consider when writing an op-ed are:

- Op-eds are typically 750 words in length but can vary depending on the outlet. Call the outlet(s) you plan to submit it to for their guidelines.
- They should be tight, to the point, timely and well-written.
- Open with a personal story or provocative statement to illustrate why the issue should matter to readers.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- For regional placement, use regional events and/or data.
- Close on a strong note. Use a short, powerful last paragraph that summarizes and drives the point home.
- Come up with a provocative title.
- Include a short biographical statement about the author at the end that explains why they are qualified to write on the topic.

## **Placing an Op-Ed**

- Finding the right person to author your op-ed is critical to getting it placed. An affected person who can open with his or her own story, a policymaker, or other influential person is ideal.
- Contact the target newspaper(s) to find out who you should submit the op-ed to. This is usually the op-ed editor, or for smaller papers, the editorial page editor.
- If you are targeting more than one newspaper in your state, you should submit to the most prominent on an exclusive basis. Once you submit a piece, you must be rejected by them or withdraw the piece before you send it to another outlet.
- All op-eds should be accompanied by a quick note that refers to the author(s), the significance of the piece and why it's timely. Thank the editor for considering your piece.
- Include op-eds in the body of the email and never as an attachment. Emails with attachments are often caught in spam filters and those that are not will not be opened for fear of viruses.
- Follow up is key. Once sent, call the outlet to make sure they received your submission. While doing so, it's ok to make a short pitch about why the piece is particularly significant and/or timely. Ask when they will make a decision and then call again to find out whether they have decided to publish the piece. While leaving a voicemail message is fine, don't be afraid to keep trying until you reach someone.
- Don't forget to thank the editor once your piece is published. A good relationship with the editorial staff can become one of your greatest assets and you try to move your issue forward.

## **Best Practices for Blogs**

Many of the tips for writing an op-ed apply to blogging as well but there are some differences:

- Blogs are typically shorter – a good length is 500-700 words.
- Blogs should take on a more conversational tone.
- Use hyperlinks on words that need definition and to link to other information you want the reader to check out (videos, articles, etc.) Search engines use hyperlinks to measure post importance.
- Conclusions should be action-centered. Possible calls of action might be join the conversation, share your story, or call your legislator.