

Writing and Publishing and Op-Ed

Opinion/editorials, called “op-eds,” are articles that appear opposite a newspaper’s editorial page. Some op-eds are written by the paper’s own columnists or syndicated columnists, but many are written by local citizens, policymakers, experts, community leaders, and other people like you. Writing an op-ed gives you the opportunity to communicate your message and viewpoints in greater detail than you can in a letter to the editor. Op-eds also have more credibility. They are good tools for influencing local decision-makers and getting a message out to a large portion of the general public.

Creating a Successful Op-Ed

Do Your Homework

If you haven’t written an op-ed before, you can get started by reading them on a regular basis. Notice what makes op-eds controversial, provocative, compelling, and current. Does your issue have these qualities? Decide which newspaper you want to approach for your piece (choose one that will best reach your audience). Read its opinion section frequently to get to know the editorial direction of the paper. Call the paper to confirm the name of the editorial page editor and find out what the criteria are for submissions. Find out whether or not it publishes quest op-eds, how frequently, on what subjects, and by what types of authors. Also find out how they prefer op-eds to be submitted.

Be Timely

Timing is the most important factor in deciding to submit an op-ed. Your piece should be tied to a current event, such as an upcoming controversial vote in the state legislature, the release of a report, a holiday or anniversary, an event in your community, etc. given the long lag-time between the submission of an op-ed and its publication, submit your op-ed immediately if, for example, you are expecting the county council to vote on an issue in four weeks.

Follow Some Writing Guidelines

- Your piece should be between 600-750 words long (800 is the absolute maximum). Newspaper editors will reject it if it is too long.
- Write about only *one issue* and make *no more* than *four* key points
- Begin with a surprising fact or a story-something that will catch the attention of both the editor and the readers. The first paragraph should introduce what you are going to cover in the rest of the piece.
- Make the piece personal-include some of your own experiences and relate the issue back to the reader.

