

Op-eds & Letters to the Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

1. Make it timely and relevant.
2. Respond to an article, editorial or op-ed. Write in response immediately (think 24 hrs) after a piece is published. Be sure to mention the name of the article and the date it was published
3. Keep it short. Only try to get one message across. Usually 50-150 words.
4. Make it personal. Use I-statements, speak about personal experience, tell a story.
5. Make it local. Point to local involvement, local responses, or relevant local statistics.
6. Mention your credentials. Sign the letter with your affiliation.
7. Publications don't print letters that are part of a manufactured campaign. Make yours unique.
8. Stick to their submission guidelines, especially word count.

SUBMITTING OP-EDS:

1. Research the publication to find a personal email address for the op-ed editor if possible, and also send to the generic email address.
2. Have an attention-getting subject line. "Op-Ed submission from X on Y issue."
3. Address the editor by name and include a 2-3 sentence coverletter explaining why they should publish your piece (its timely and unique because etc...). Include your credentials and a short (2-line) bio. Thank them.
4. Paste your article into the body of the email.
5. Follow up. Pick up the phone and call the editor after 24 hrs (depending on the urgency of the piece). Keep calling until you speak to someone who gives you a yes or no answer. If they tell you no, make the most of this opportunity to ask what they are looking for and what you should do next time.

WRITING OP-EDS:

1. **Timing:** It doesn't have to be a perfect piece, but if yours is the first submission you have a much higher chance of being published.
2. **Stick to the guidelines and word limits.** Research what the publication accepts and follow their rules. Generally word limits are between 500 and 750 words.
3. **The first paragraph is the most important.** Make it timely, relevant, and personal. Follow a general argument flow:
 - o identify a problem
 - o make it personal
 - o bring in evidence to support your claims
 - o use social math, put statistics into comparisons that people can understand
 - o wrap it up to a solution, policy suggestion, or a call to action.
6. You can ask the editor to share the final piece with you before it runs, make sure you are comfortable with any edits.
7. Suggest a title. You may not have much control over the title, but your suggestion can help.
8. After your op-ed is published go ahead and send it to other publications who might want to repost it. Share it on social media and ask your friends to as well.
9. Thank the editor! You are developing a relationship. In smaller media markets you can even go in and introduce yourself to editors.