WRITE AN OP-ED

TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE AND PLACE AN OP-ED

Writing an op-ed is one way to elevate your voice on a current issue. A well-crafted op-ed can spark conversation and persuade others. This guide walks you through the essentials.

The Lede: Hook Your Reader

The first sentence is everything. You have just a few seconds to grab your reader's attention, so make it count. It should demand attention and make readers want to continue.

Tips for a strong opening:

- **Be bold.** Start with a provocative question, powerful quote, personal story, surprising fact, or even a well-placed joke.
- **Be timely and relevant.** Tie your piece to a current event, upcoming holiday, anniversary, or new announcement.
- **Avoid the generic.** Tie your argument to what's happening at the moment. Don't write something that could be published at any time.

The Body: Make Your Argument

Once you've drawn your audience in, it's time to deliver your message clearly and confidently. How you say it can be just as important as what you say.

What to include:

- **Explain clearly:** Break down complex ideas without dumbing them down. Simple language builds credibility and trust.
- **Memorable takeaways:** Provide a small, repeatable takeaway that readers can easily recall. Infuse this several times in the piece.
- **Anticipate objections:** Is there a common counter-argument? Use this space to disprove it.

The Close: Bring It Home

End with impact. Reinforce your opening idea, leave your reader with a sense of urgency or possibility, and clearly show what's at stake.

Strong conclusions:

- Echo your opening line or image.
- Show a vision of a better future or a warning of what's to come.
- Inspire reflection, not just reaction.

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THE POLICY CIRCLE

Best practices

- Keep the pace engaging by varying sentence length and paragraph structure.
- Guide the reader ("Here's why this matters…" or "What's at stake…").
- Avoid telling the reader what to do.
- Back up your claims and use well-sourced facts.
- Avoid bouncing between unrelated points. Keep your argument linear and logical.

What's Next?

Getting published takes more than great writing. It takes planning.

Here's how to give your piece the best shot:

- Decide where to submit
  - National outlets require broad appeal and are more challenging to publish in.
  - Local publications are more receptive to community-level commentary and are easier to secure placement in.
- Review the submission guidelines carefully. Word counts, formatting, and contact details will vary by publication.
- Time your op-ed with a relevant news hook, upcoming event, or research release. Give enough time to get it placed before it happens.

The Pitch

- The pitch should be only several sentences long and give a glimpse of the piece's topic and importance.
- Establish your expertise in the pitch. If you have personal or professional experience with the topic you're writing about, include that.
- Only pitch one outlet at a time. Many outlets require exclusivity, so start with your top outlet, and if it is denied or you don't hear back, move on from there.
- Give the editor at least 48 hours to respond before sending a follow-up. If they don't respond after the second follow-up, move to the next outlet.

Final Tips

- Push yourself: Writing a great op-ed is like exercising a civic muscle — the more you do it, the stronger your voice becomes.
- Edit relentlessly: Tighten your language. Remove anything that doesn't serve your core message.
- Be patient: Not every piece will be accepted, but every draft improves your advocacy skills.

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR
TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE AN LTE

A Letter to the Editor (LTE) is a powerful way to make your voice heard quickly. Whether you're challenging an idea, supporting a position, or offering a fresh perspective, an LTE connects your point of view directly to a broader public conversation that's currently happening.

What is an LTE?

An LTE is a short, focused response to a recently published article or opinion piece, usually within several days of its publication. Most newspapers will only consider LTEs that react to content they've recently run, so timing is everything.

Key Guidelines

- **Keep it short:** Most LTEs should be **150–200 words** max. Always check the publication's specific word limit and submission requirements.
- **Be timely:** Submit your letter within a few days of the article you're responding to.
- **Take a position:** Agree or disagree with the article and explain why.
- **Cite the article:** Mention the title, author, and date of the original piece you're responding to in your first sentence. Example: *"In response to 'New Legislation Sparks Local Debate' by Jane Smith (Aug. 4), I believe..."*
- **Focus on one point:** Clarity is critical. Stick to a single idea and support it briefly but powerfully.
- **Speak from experience:** Personal examples or lived experience can make your argument resonate more deeply.
- **Avoid form letters:** Editors look for authentic and original takes.

What to Say

A strong LTE typically follows this structure

1. **Hook:** Reference the article you're responding to.
2. **Your position:** Agree or disagree, and explain your view.
3. **Support:** Provide 1–2 quick facts, experiences, or insights to support your stance.
4. **Conclusion:** Wrap up with a sentence that underscores why this issue matters.

Final Tips

- **Proofread before submitting:** Clarity and professionalism matter.
- **Follow instructions exactly:** Check the outlet's word count, format, and whether a phone number or address is required for verification.
- **Act quickly:** The sooner you respond, the more likely your letter will be published.