



Op-ed and Letter to the Editor Tips

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor can be very useful tools to promote a message and advocate or argue a position.

Op-ed vs. Letter to the Editor

- Op-eds are typically longer (600 to 750 words) and feature self-contained arguments that stand alone.
- Letters to the editor are short (usually 150 to 250 words) and usually provide a direct response to an article that has appeared in the publication. If you have a brief point to make, a letter to the editor is the best tool. Publications run many more letters than op-eds; thus, chances of getting letters published are much greater.

Tips for Writing Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

- *Timeliness:* Op-eds and letters to the editor need to be timely and address issues that are currently in the news. In the case of a letter to the editor, you must send it within one or two days after the original story appears. Because of limited space, it is common for editors to hold potential columns for weeks while they consider whether to run it. Op-eds written with longer “shelf lives” will have a much greater chance of getting published.
- *Point of View:* Opinion editors look for articles that are provocative and succinctly argue particular points of view on issues that are dominating the headlines. They do not want pieces that argue all sides of an issue.
- *Clarity:* Op-eds in general-circulation publications should be comprehensible to all readers. Use plain language and avoid acronyms and academic or legalistic language, use active voice and a moderate tone.
- *Respect Your Reader:* Never underestimate your reader’s intelligence, or overestimate the reader’s level of information. Recognize that your average reader is not an expert in your topic, and that the onus is on you to capture attention and make a compelling argument.
- *Accuracy:* Double-check all your facts, the spelling of names and places, and make certain you have no grammatical errors. Even simple mistakes can hurt your credibility and cause an otherwise well-written piece to be rejected.
- *Length:* Follow the word-length limits set by the publication. Your piece is most likely to be selected if it fits the format. Typically, op-eds should be no more than 750 words, although each publication sets its own limit and the trend is toward shorter pieces. Submit only completed pieces – editors will not respond to queries on topics.
- *Exclusivity:* Newspapers usually demand exclusivity on op-eds they publish. If you are planning to submit to multiple publications, give each paper one week to consider the piece. Review each newspaper’s guidelines.
- *Identification:* Include your name under the headline of your submission. A short statement of your credentials should be included at the end of the article (25 words or fewer).
- *Submission:* Virtually all op-eds and letters are submitted via email. Most media outlets will include the submission address on their opinion pages. If you need contact information for a particular outlet, call the News and Information Bureau.
- *Following Up:* Op-ed editors will usually call only if they plan to use a piece. If you must follow up with a phone call, make sure to keep it short. Never call after 3 p.m., when editors are on deadline.