

Writing Effective Op-Eds

Doctors For A Healthy US, LLC & Doctors in Politics

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Purpose

- Peoples' opinions are rarely based on facts alone. Friends, family, and trusted figures in the community play a significant role in how most people develop their beliefs.
- The public perceives health professionals as being trustworthy; this makes the perspectives of health professionals crucial in influencing peoples' opinions.
- Op-eds are a great relational organizing tool. Relational organizing describes the harnessing of personal and professional relationships to create dialogue, establish common goals, and initiate community change.

General Op-ed Tips

- Keep the topic applicable and relevant to current news.
- Consider your local community:
 - How can you offer a unique perspective on an issue in your area?
 - How do your experiences (not necessarily professional) relate to current events?
- Once you have a potential topic, brainstorm ideas and write for several minutes without pausing or editing. Take a break and return to it later.
- Make a single point in about 600-750 words.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Write in the [active voice](#).
- Consider the audience:
 - Keep in mind why the audience cares.
 - Avoid partisanship; acknowledge and respect the "other."
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Keep the op-ed accessible to a broad audience by writing at an 8th grade literacy level.
- 3-4 authors is typically the maximum for an op-ed. *Consider:* How could collaboration expand the scope/expertise of your piece?

Structure of the Op-Ed

- The **headline** should be catchy, bringing attention to the uniqueness of the piece.
- The **introduction** should hook readers and clearly state the main point.
- In the **body paragraphs**:
 - Incorporate your own expertise and stories (remember, personal information is often more impactful than factual information)
 - Avoid leading the argument with data
 - Limit the overall amount of data used
 - Answer the question, “So what?”
 - Make specific recommendations to address the issue at hand
- In the **conclusion**, summarize your argument and recommendations, and voice a call to action (“Thank you for reading, now here’s what you can do!”).
- The ultimate goal of an op-ed is to get people to act and create change.

Social Math

- Social math makes facts and data more approachable by using stories, comparisons, familiar concepts, or visuals.
- For example, to bring attention to issues surrounding youth incarceration, you could compare the amount of money spent on youth in school with the amount spent on youth in jail.
- Visuals are helpful in quantifying and contextualizing things. For example, by showing how many [gun dealers there are in California compared with the number of McDonald's, libraries, and schools](#), readers are led to a discussion of how resources are being utilized in the state.

Where to Pitch

- Local and state level media outlets might be more likely to publish than large, national outlets.
- Local publishing might mean more people who actually know you will read your piece.

- When looking at a media outlet, consider:
 - What is their style?
 - What do they normally publish?
 - Could your piece provide expertise and information that they value and/or need more of?

Pitching Etiquette

- Pitch via a form from the media outlet's website, or directly via email.
- Never send an email with an attachment: copy & paste op-ed.
- **Subject line:** [main issue] + [timeliness]
- **Email body:**
 - Use the editor's name.
 - Introduce yourself, your role, and your credentials. State the topic, explain your point, and emphasize its newsworthiness.
 - Paste op-ed.
- **Conclude** with your name(s), a reliable contact email, and a reliable (non-office) phone number.
- If you haven't heard back, don't assume they have passed on your piece!
 - If your op-ed is especially timely, follow up with the editor 24 hours after sending.
 - Otherwise, check in with the editor about a week after sending.
- If you are notified that your piece has been rejected, be sure to thank the editor. Do not repeatedly resubmit an unchanged piece.
- Incorporate any feedback, rework the piece, and consider resubmitting when the news cycle returns to your topic.
- Self-publication is a possibility.
- If you get published, share your piece broadly within your own network.

Additional Resources

- [The Op-Ed Project](#)
- [Berkeley Media Studies Group](#)
- [Duke Communicator Toolkit](#)