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## Op-Ed Article

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An op-ed (short for “Opposite the Editorial”) is a short piece that usually appears in a newspaper or magazine and offers the opinion of the writer, who is not affiliated with the publication in which the article appears.

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### General Guidelines

- **Be timely.** When an issue is dominating the news, that is all readers will want to read and editors will want to publish. Whenever possible, link your issue explicitly to something happening in that current news cycle. If your article is on cancer, for example, start off by discussing the celebrity who died yesterday. Alternatively, look ahead to a holiday or anniversary in the near future that will provide a fresh news peg. Editors like being able to plan a story in advance.
- **Make a single point—well.** You cannot describe the entirety of a problem and its solution in the length of an op-ed (approx. 750 words). Choose a single, strong point and focus on making it as clearly and persuasively as possible. If you cannot explain your argument in a sentence or two, you’re trying to cover too much.
- **Tell your readers why they should care.** Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your article. Your article should prove its own importance and should do so throughout. How will your proposed solution effect/benefit them directly? Appeals to the readers’ self-interest are almost always more effective than abstract punditry or appeals to morality.
- **Offer specific recommendations.** The purpose of an op-ed is to provide balanced opinions on issues along with constructive solutions to those issues. Description and analysis should only be half of the article. The other half should focus on providing actionable solutions. For example—how exactly should your state protect its environment? What kind of policies should it enact? You don’t have to provide a step-by-step plan, but you should do more than call for “more research” or encourage conversations.
- **Emphasize your personal connection to your readers.** Op-ed editors increasingly prefer authors who live locally or have other connections to the community. If you’re submitting an article to your local newspaper, this will work in your favor. If you’re submitting to a publication in a city where you once lived or worked, be sure to mention this in your cover note and byline. Likewise, if you’re submitting to a publication that is directed at a specific demographic, be sure to mention any connections you have to that group.
- **Acknowledge the other side.** Always dedicate a section of your article, even just a sentence, to acknowledging the merits of counterarguments. Avoid the urge to pile on reason after reason as to why you are completely right and your opponent is completely wrong, and NEVER badmouth them. This will make your argument appear biased and one-sided, which will diminish your authority.

## Writing the Article

- **Limit yourself to 750 words.** Shorter is even better. Newspapers have limited space to offer, and editors generally won't take time to cut a long article down to size.
- **State your argument at the beginning.** When your article is presented to busy readers among dozens of others, you need to hook a reader within the first sentence to ensure they keep reading. Get to the meat of the argument as soon as possible.
- **Showing is better than discussing.** Focus on real-world examples of how your issue affects your community rather than focusing on isolated statistics. You will be far more successful in driving your point home if you demonstrate the ways in which your readers have been/will continue to be affected by an issue than you will by defining it in terms that readers have no connection to and may not even understand.
- **Use the active voice.** Active voice is nearly always better than passive voice. It's easier to read, and it leaves no doubt about who is doing the actions. Particularly when it comes to politics, passive voice is often used to obfuscate blame (e.g., "Mistakes were made"). You always want to center the actor, rather than the action.
- **Use short sentences and paragraphs.** Long, complex sentences get boring and hard to follow quickly for readers who are, more likely than not, skimming your article for the broad strokes. Stick to simple declarative sentences and keep your paragraphs to 4-5 sentences at maximum.
- **Avoid jargon.** It is likely that a majority of your readers will not be familiar with terms and concepts specific to your field or discipline. If you must discuss such topics in your op-ed, break them down to their basics, only including the elements that are necessary to understand your argument.
- **Embrace your personal voice.** The reader will care more about what you have to say if it sounds like a real, relatable person is writing it. Lean into your personal writing style, and whenever possible/appropriate, feature your own experiences. If you're a physician, for example, describe the plight of one of your patients and how it affected you on a personal, emotional level.
- **Avoid tedious rebuttals.** If your article is a response to a previously published piece, avoid the temptation to simply write a point-by-point rebuttal of its argument. It makes you look petty and one-sided. Furthermore, it's likely that readers haven't read the earlier article, and if they have, they've probably forgotten it, so your rebuttal won't resonate with them in the way you'd like it to. If a rebuttal is necessary to your argument, then you should be writing a Letter to the Editor rather than a general op-ed.
- **Make your ending a winner.** Just as a compelling introduction is vital to hooking your reader in, a strong, conclusive ending is equally as important to make sure your ideas stick with your reader, even after they've put the newspaper down. As with any conclusion, summarize the high points of your argument in a way that emphasizes the significance/implications of it.

