

Tips for Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed

Almost all newspapers include an “op-ed” section, which allows anyone to express their ideas and viewpoints, generally in response to a particular news event or issue. Op-eds are generally 600 to 750 words and should express your opinion about a current news topic.

Op-eds are among the most read sections of a newspaper, making them a great vehicle for spreading information about a particular topic.

Here are a few tips for writing and submitting your op-ed:

- Look for a timely news hook. You need to give the editor a reason to run your op-ed right now. For instance, if a new report showing that children’s health in New Mexico is ranked low on some measure, you could use that report as the foundation for your discussion of the need for a children’s agenda. Look locally, too. In your city or county, are there any examples of problems with schools, firearms, access to care, child protection, or other issues addressed in the *Agenda for New Mexico’s Children*?
- Follow newspaper guidelines for word limits and style. Usually, 600 to 750 words will suffice. Don’t expect editors to spend time editing your 4,000-word manuscript down to size, or to suddenly decide to run it as a full-page feature. Most newspapers use Associated Press (AP) style for things like usage of the Oxford comma, contractions, and word choice. For a good overview of AP style and other journalistic tips, see the [OWL at Purdue University](#). Check the newspaper’s online opinion page for submission guidelines, or look for guideline from the top 100 papers nationwide at bit.ly/cacVBi, a useful page from The Op-Ed Project (www.theopedproject.org).
- *Stick to the point.* You can’t cover everything in 600 to 750 words. Choose one part of the *Agenda* and focus on it, making your point clearly and persuasively. State your thesis (your argument) in the first or second paragraph.
- Avoid long sentences and paragraphs. Keep your thoughts clear and distinct, and write at about sixth-grade level. Use short, simple sentences.
- *Write in plain language.* Use [plain language guidelines](#); do not use jargon. For example, instead of “require collaborative improvement efforts,” write “everyone will need to work together to make things better.” Stay away from acronyms and medical terms.
- *Show, don’t tell.* Descriptions, examples, anecdotes, and personal stories can help you to explain and bring complicated issues to life. Think about your personal experiences as a physician and how one or two recommendations from the *Agenda* might help your patients, their families, and your community. Of course, be aware of privacy guidelines. If you change identifying details, be sure to say you did so.
- *State your opinion.* Remember, you are writing an opinion piece. Give your readers one or two specific recommendations about how to fix the problem you have described. But there’s no need to couch them in language like “In my opinion...” as that can sound apologetic.
- *Tell them what you’ve told them.* Use your final paragraph to sum things up – and restate your argument.
- *Tell them who you are.* Include your contact information and credentials at the end of the piece. Include your name, address, phone, fax and e-mail contact information at the bottom of the piece.

- *Email it, return receipt requested.* Most newspapers prefer that op-eds are emailed, not faxed or snail-mailed. Editors generally don't open attachments, as a way to prevent infection with a computer virus. So copy and paste your op-ed into the body of an email message. Instructions for submitting an op-ed are usually on the opinion page of the paper's website.
- *Follow up:* If you haven't heard from an editor at the paper within 7 to 10 days, follow up with a polite inquiry via e-mail or phone call. Ask if it was received and whether it was appropriate for the publication. If the editor says no, don't argue. Say thank you and let the editor know that you are open to tips for improvement.

Need help? Email executivedirector@nmaap.org to be referred to a professional writer who can help you craft your op-ed.