

Writing Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor

Tipsheet by José Rico for Spokes Hub training on April 11, 2024

What is an Op-Ed and what is a Letter to the Editor?

Op-Ed

- Stands for “opposite the editorial page” from back when newspapers were the main form of news dissemination. The editorial page is typically where an editorial board, publisher, and/or senior staff member at the publication share their opinions. So on the opposite page would be people outside of the organization sharing their opinions, often in response to an editorial.
- May also be called “opinion” or “commentary”
- Usually longer (400-800 words depending on publication)
- By a subject matter expert like you
- Timely and current
- Relevant to a publication’s audience
- More likely to go through a vetting and editing process

Letter to the Editor

- Much shorter (250 words)
- Written by a publication’s audience member
- Often a response to an article, editorial or op-ed
- Less barriers to entry as far as vetting/editing
- Less prominent in print or online

What to expect

- You may have to pitch and get an idea approved first.
- You likely cannot be anonymous. Consider using an advocate name (a name separate from your legal name, work name, etc.).
- Your piece may or may not go through editing + fact-checking. The process can change drastically whether a news organization is really small and under-staffed, or you’re writing for a larger, more robust organization.

- Your piece will be online and maybe in print. There may be public comment or lashback. There may be a printed response to it.
- Your words will create a tool for future advocates, researchers, journalists, etc.

Checklist for Developing an Op-Ed Strategy

- What has you fired up:
- What is generally timely about this topic:
- Who is your audience:
- What publication/news organization caters to your audience:
- What are the criteria/guidelines for this pub/new org's:
- What kind of support do you have post-publishing:

Tools for writing & editing

- Find examples of op-eds on similar topics that inspire you
- Timed writing can be helpful to get started
- AI tools can be useful if writer's block strikes
- Do you have access to a ghost writer? Many times you won't, but you can reach out to Spokes Hub co-coordinators through spokeshub@woodhullfoundation.org to discuss working with a ghost writer through our program.
- Have a friend read over your work, or a peer here at Spokes Hub!
- Edit your own work by reading it backwards

Examples of Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor

- "[No Housing for the Unchaste](#)" by Savannah Sly for VTDigger (Regional/statewide audience)
 - Explore [this VTDigger page](#) (and pages linked on it) for a strong example of guidelines for writing a column, commentary and letter to the editor for them.
- "[Ohioans will be hacked, swatted, if porn ID bill passes, adult industry veteran says](#)" by Alexandra Snow for The Columbus Dispatch (Metro audience in Ohio capitol city)

- [“Decriminalizing sex work would save lives in D.C.”](#) by Julia Lukomnik for The Washington Post.
 - Explore [this Washington Post](#) page (and pages linked on it) for an example of clear guidelines for writing a guest opinion and letter to the editor.

More Resources

- [The OpEd Project](#)'s mission is to increase the range of voices and quality of ideas heard in the world. Their focus is on building a radically inclusive society moving towards freedom and justice by accelerating the ideas and impact of underrepresented thinkers. They have a range of free resources and tipsheets to explore.
- [“Writing a Slam Dunk Op-Ed”](#) tipsheet from Resource Media
- [“10 Tips for Writing Effective Op-Eds”](#) from the National Women’s Law Center
- [“The Art of Writing Op-Eds in 8 Easy Steps”](#) from the Housing Narrative Lab
- Have more questions about writing commentary or working with news organizations? Reach out to Spokes Hub co-coordinators through spokeshub@woodhullfoundation.org.