

## Op-eds

Opinion pieces, colloquially known as “op-eds” because they appear on the editorial pages of the newspaper next to syndicated writers such as George Will or Cokie Roberts, offer you a chance to get your viewpoint out in a visible way. Op-eds are, some of which are solicited by a newspaper’s opinions editor, are written by people not affiliated with the paper—from business executives and scientists to school kids and interested local citizens.

It is often difficult to get an op-ed published in a newspaper. There is limited space for them and editors receive a larger number of unsolicited articles. You might consider other options first, as op-eds take more effort and time than a letter to the editor, for example, or a guest post on a relevant, well-read blog.

Just like a good essay, op-eds have an introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction should grab the reader and encourage him or her to read on. Use timely references, colorful language, metaphors, or personal references to get the reader’s attention. Try to limit the introductory paragraph to three sentences.

The body of the piece further develops your thesis, giving some background and context. Keep each paragraph short and focused. Each paragraph should range from three to five sentences. Try to make one point in each paragraph, and be sure each paragraph flows into the next smoothly. Every paragraph should tie back to the introduction and your overall thesis. Be sure not to get off-track or follow tangents; if the reader will only take away one message from your op-ed, what do you want it to be?

The final paragraph should wrap up the piece. Do not leave any dangling ends. Tie everything up and close with a kick. Your conclusion should refer back to your introduction, carrying the same theme but adding something new. Use your conclusion to state your overall point or opinion. As the first sentence should grab the reader and make her/him want to continue to read, the last sentence should be memorable and make your overall point stick in the reader’s mind.

### Tips:

1. **Do some research first.** Before you sit down to write your op-ed, check with your local newspaper to find out the protocol for submitting opinion editorials. Many papers have strict word limits; be sure to follow them carefully. Call your paper and ask how they prefer to receive op-ed submissions, what the word limit is, to whose attention it should be sent, and if they require any supplemental information beyond the personal information listed above. Sending an op-ed to the wrong person, one that is not the correct length, or failing to include all the information they require can keep even the best op-ed out of print.
2. **Try to anticipate news.** Make sure that the newspaper has covered the issue you want to write about. Editors want readers to have some context for the topics you want to address. If possible, deliver your op-ed a few days before you want it to run. If you are writing about Independence Day, for example, you should submit a piece the last week in June, not July 3.
3. **Use a catchy title that ties into the theme of your piece.** The title is what the reader sees first. Your title should entice the reader. Keep in mind that at times, editors will reserve the right to change titles.
4. **Keep the op-ed short and to the point.** Ideally, an op-ed should be 550-725 words. Remember, newspapers have very limited space. A shorter piece has a better chance of getting printed.
5. **Grab the reader’s attention in the first couple of lines** and close with a sentence that will help him or her remember your point. Be creative—an interesting article is more likely to be printed and more likely to be remembered.

6. **Include personal information at the end your op-ed:** name, university or organization, title, phone number, address. Many papers will not run a piece without first being able to confirm that you are its author.
7. **Follow-up.** A few days after you submit your op-ed, you should place a follow-up call to the op-ed editor to check on their interest in running the article.

Op-ed: Andy on the Shutdown:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/government-shutdown-was-temporary-the-damage-to-science-permanent/>

Andrew Rosenberg, Director of the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, had this op-ed featured in Scientific American after the government shutdown in October 2013: [“The Government Shutdown Was Temporary, Its Damage to Science Permanent”](#). The piece was published just after the government shutdown ended, so it was still relevant and a big news story. The headline is attention-grabbing, and the beginning sets the tone for the rest of the article. The stories from scientists about how their research was affected added a more personal touch that many pieces about the shutdown couldn't offer. The op-ed concluded by driving the point home.