



How to write an op-ed

Topic

Your topic needs to be forceful. It should be provocative, new, controversial, and current. Op-ed loves blunt opinion, advocacy, denunciation, outrage, astonishment—all the heavy emotions. Editors want to create buzz eliciting either a Whoa! or a Hmm. The purpose of an op-ed is to wow people with a striking statement to draw them in and then make them think about the issue in a new way through your argument in the body of your piece.

Try writing your topic into a single sentence, does it make you say whoa or hmm?

Coming up with a topic

React to the news of the world.

Focus specifically on something whether a story, one aspect of a larger situation, an effect of something (ex. story of you getting to know your refugee neighbor, and the difficulties, joys and funny moments in that process. Don't write generally about the refugee crisis)

The key is being focused! The more focused the more persuasive it is

Style

Write in your own voice

Write like a conversational human, don't try to sound fancy and use lots of jargon because chances are the people reading it don't know what all those technical words mean, and if they don't know what you're saying, they won't keep reading.

Outline

Opening paragraph

The first line is the most important line of the whole piece, because if they don't get past the first line they are going to miss the whole argument. Think about when you are reading the newspaper, skimming headlines and first paragraphs for what looks interesting enough to take the time to read the whole article. What do the articles you read all have in common? They all had a strong beginning that drew you in because you were curious about what they were going to say next. Be bold, with the first sentence and first paragraph. If you only had this one paragraph could you convince your reader?

Background

If there is background needed to understand what you are writing incorporate that here in a paragraph. Only include the minimum background necessary so it doesn't bog your article down. Not all background on the issue needs to be included. Think about what is unique and pertinent to your piece, and what could be considered general knowledge, or at least mildly well known.

Main points

In the middle defend your statement with facts and stories and emotions. This is the meat of your argument where you convince your reader through both facts and stories and emotion.

Write one or two sentences on each of your supporting arguments and data points.

Don't be afraid to include emotion. Op-eds are about the heavy emotions, getting people to feel, respond and engage with them. Emotion begets emotion so include the emotion of the issue. This gives the readers a window into why you are so passionate about it, and it helps them become passionate too. Take one paragraph to just focus on the emotion of it. Write a couple emotion based paragraphs that focus on different emotions and then pick the best one.

Counter argument

A strong argument should have strong opponents. Take time to raise the oppositions argument and then shut it down. Use the oppositions strongest argument because it will make your argument that much stronger when it can counter and demolish strong arguments.

Conclusion

End the piece with a concise restating of your position and call to action. Use this space to propose a strong solution to the problem you identified. This is one of the most important parts for giving your op-ed credibility.

Include a short bio, just a few sentences, that says why you are qualified to write this.

Revising

Edit, edit and edit some more! Reread, revise, and redraft until you are certain that each word is important, then have someone else edit it. A key component of op-eds is their conciseness and brevity; it is not the place to include long winded tangents.

Formatting

Between 400 and 1200 words (750 is ideal)

Use active verbs

Don't start sentences with there is/are

Use short paragraphs

How to get it published

Send it to the editor of your local newspaper. Often in the op-ed section they have information about how to submit a piece.