



Op-Ed Writing Guidelines

While newspapers and related sites have much content that follows the current events—reporting on the hard facts of cases in an dispassionate or often objective voice—opinion pieces allow you, the reader, to express your point of view with personal and fiery language. Opinion pieces should come from your point of view, tell the stories that matter to you, and say something that is unique. They should be factually based, but the facts should not be the focus of the piece, rather the evidence for your position.

Unlike traditional reporting, Op-Eds can and should include “you” as the writer. The power of an Op-Ed lies in how you’re able to make the facts personal, how you have seen how what you’re advocating for makes a positive impact in your community. Think of standard news coverage as the recipe for a dish, you know the basic components and how it comes together, but picture Op-Eds as the actual taste of the dish.

When drafting an opinion piece, research the outlet you are submitting to. First, this helps in identifying what coverage of the issue is missing from their papers. If you read your local paper and think, “Hey, why aren’t they talking about this?” or “Why are they talking about this issue in this way, they are missing something,” then you’ve already identified what you should write about.

Many outlets have a word limit around 600, but please check their website for guidance. Feel free to use the points in the writing tips and sample Op-Eds below as you draft, or feel free to write directly from the heart - what you have to say deserves to be heard!

Below are some writing tips for a successful Op-Ed, including an idea for a paragraph by paragraph structure, and some templates for submitting your article to an editor. Usually you can google how to submit your Op-Ed to your paper, but feel free to let us know if you need help figuring out where to send it.

Op-Ed Structure

1st Paragraph:

Begin your draft with a first line that will catch the eye of the editor. Remember, consider where you will be pitching your draft, it’s likely that you’ll be trying to get this published locally, so consider what would make a reader take the time out of their day to consider your point of view.

This is also a moment to establish your voice, show why you're writing about this issue, and why you're writing about it now.

2nd Paragraph:

This is the paragraph that you can use to address the context for why you're writing about this issue. The Presidential Determination is quickly approaching and your member of Congress has the opportunity to raise their voice and urge the administration to reverse its course. Stress that historically, support for resettlement and the asylum process has been endorsed by both Republican and Democrat presidents, let the reader know that this shouldn't be a bipartisan issue, but an American one.

3rd Paragraph:

We now have paragraphs that address why you're writing and a bit of the context of the issue, now is the time to make your piece strike a chord. Make it resonate by telling a short anecdote about your experience as a member of the faith community by quoting scripture, your friendship with a member of the asylum-seeking community by talking about a watershed moment for you in realizing the importance of welcoming, or, especially in the time of public health crises and financial uncertainty, your knowledge of a new American working on the frontlines of the pandemic to make our country safer and stronger during these troubling times. Don't be afraid to make it personal, speak to your passion, this isn't an academic paper, this is your story.

4th Paragraph:

Now you can pivot back to some of the specifics you're calling for. For example, let's say we want to raise the resettlement ceiling, eliminate Title 42, or get rid of MPP and return to our tradition of welcoming the stranger. You should feel free to name elected officials who can make a difference for you, whether it be on the local, state, or national level. Here's some example language on raising the resettlement goal, but you should make any language your own:

During the last administration, refugee resettlement was cut by more than 80%, from the historic average goal of 95,000—an average supported by both Republican and Democrat presidents—to an all-time low of 18,000. And while our country has begun to safely resettle more refugees and reunite more families, there is more to be done. Refugees have contributed greatly to America in ordinary times, and have continued to show up for their new communities during the COVID-19 crisis, with many on the frontlines, including 161,000 serving as healthcare workers and 170,000 working in food supply chains. That's why I'm calling on [REPRESENTATIVE'S NAME], to make sure [he/she] does everything in their power to help the vulnerable and welcome the stranger.

5th Paragraph:

Underline who new Americans are in your community. They are business owners, tax payers, parents, workers, volunteers, and more. You've told your story above, now paint it a bit more broadly so the reader can make the connection to someone in their network. For example:

New Americans are mothers, fathers, and children. They are doctors, teachers, lawyers, business owners, craftsmen, and musicians. As the world searches for solutions to the largest displacement crisis in history, we have a moral and legal obligation to those seeking a chance to rebuild their lives and create a better future for their families. [[Asylum seekers/refugees]] are no different than our ancestors who were once found welcome and were called on to do the same.

6th Paragraph:

This will be the closing of your draft, make it short and simple, don't reiterate all the points you've made above, instead use it as a call to action. Again, another example for you to make your own:

As a proud [Texan, Tennessean, Coloradan, etc] my duty is to make sure we honor the spirit of this great state and continue our proud history as a place where those in need come to build lives of purpose. To do otherwise would be to dishonor our legacy of welcome and turn our back on what made us what we are today.

Lastly, include your one line bio in italics at the end, for example:

Jane Smith is pastor at XXXX Church in Houston.

Pitching Your Op-Ed

When pitching your Op-Ed or announcing your availability for interviews, it is important to keep your pitch short and on message. Most editors and outlets prefer pitches over email or through a submission form on their website. It is important to keep your pitch as short as possible, as reporters are often on a deadline and receive many story pitches every day. Open your pitch with an interesting first line and relate the pitch back to another story the reporter has recently written to increase the likelihood of the reporter picking up your story. Please see the draft pitch below for an example email.

When pitching your Op-Ed, look into what the particular news outlet has printed recently for how you can highlight your piece as showcasing a different and needed perspective for the publication's readers.

Only pitch your Op-Ed to **one outlet at a time**, offering it as an exclusive. If you have not heard from the editor after 24 hours, follow up by thanking them for their consideration and offer to answer any questions they may have about the piece. If, however, the editor hasn't responded within 48 hours after your follow-up email, send a friendly email thanking the editor again for their consideration and let them know that you are taking the piece elsewhere in the interest of keeping it timely (ex: "Thank you again for your consideration of my opinion piece on welcoming refugees to our community, however, in the interests of keeping it timely, I'm going to take this elsewhere. I'll be sure and reach out to you next time I have something that I think your readers would be interested in").

Lastly, more and more, people are reluctant to open attached files in emails from someone they don't know, so I suggest pasting the text of your Op-Ed below your pitch.

Draft Pitch Email for Op-Ed

Dear Editor,

As the global community faces the largest displacement crisis in history, I've been concerned about how we can return to our proud tradition of resettling refugees and creating a welcoming community. Serving as a leader with ORGANIZATION, I have a vested interest in making sure we do what's right by the most vulnerable, and want to share my experience to show how our community is better off when we welcome the stranger.

In that spirit, I authored the below op-ed, **offered to you exclusively**, detailing my experience and reaffirming the need for us all to work together and create an inclusive community. In light of dwindling numbers of refugees joining our community, this piece offers a timely response and highlights the urgent need to create a welcoming place for all people.

Please feel free to contact me at EMAIL or over the phone at PHONE NUMBER if you have any questions or would like to discuss the piece in greater detail. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,
NAME

Draft Follow-up Email for Op-Ed

Dear [Editor's Name].

Thanks again for your consideration of my opinion piece on the need to welcome refugees to our communities. I wanted to check in to see if you had any questions or concerns about the draft. I'd be happy to hop on the phone to discuss.

Thanks,
NAME