

Drafting Op-Eds to Enhance Your Advocacy

Op-eds give you an ideal opportunity to go into some depth about an issue and its potential solutions. With an average length of 500-800 words, you can give some background to educate readers and make the case for the position you want others to adopt.

Anatomy of an Op-Ed

An effective op-ed will include the following elements:

- **A lede:** A short opening paragraph that captures the reader's attention and summarizes what they can expect to glean from reading your article.
- **A short description of the problem:** Describe briefly what the issue is and why readers should care about it, keeping in mind that not all of your target outlet's readers will necessarily have the background information that you bring to the table.
- **A clear thesis:** You should be able to summarize the position you're taking in a single sentence; if doing so is a challenge, you may need to narrow the focus of your op-ed to increase its chances of placement. Your thesis should be coherently articulated and should advance a claim that is timely and salient to the readers of your target outlet.
- **Evidence:** Your argument will be viewed credibly by readers—and the editor who decides whether your op-ed will be published—if it's backed by evidence. Evidence comes in many forms— anecdotes, testimonials, facts, statistics and more. Give some thought to how you will lend credibility to your claims. For example, could you include data from your organization to illustrate the challenges you have experienced with recruitment and retention of direct support professionals?
- **A call to action:** Generally, op-eds will close by concisely articulating what a person or group with influence should do given the information you have presented. In some cases, this may also include articulating what readers themselves can do to educate or urge action among the lawmakers or regulators with influence.

Example: If you believe State Representative Hernandez should make good on her promise to do right by residents of Springfield with disabilities, please call her office today to encourage her to support new legislation that would increase payment rates in the state's Medicaid program.

- **Your byline:** In a single sentence, articulate your name, position and, if it's not immediately evident from your position, the experience you have that qualifies you to write on the issue at hand.

Example: Rhodie Collins is a direct support professional for Happy Valley Supports and the parent of a child with cerebral palsy.

Questions to Consider as You Outline Your Op-Ed

Getting clear on the following questions before you begin drafting will help you craft a coherent, cohesive message:

- What is the thesis or main argument of your op-ed?
- Who is the audience? Why is it important that they read and understand your argument?
- What does the audience need to know in order to understand and agree with your argument?
- Why does this argument matter now? Is it more relevant or salient in this moment compared to others? Might it be more salient if published at a particular time in the future (e.g., ahead of an important election)?
- How does your voice contribute in a way that others' voices do not?
- What counter-positions might you need to preempt as you build the case for your argument?

Pro Tips for Crafting Your Op-Ed

- **Be persuasive:** A successful op-ed leverages facts and figures, personal anecdotes and stories of people in the community to build a case for a persuasive argument. Including statistics can help you articulate the scope of the problem you're seeking to address, but should not be used at the exclusion of personal, relatable accounts of how the problem is affecting real people in their real lives.
- **Be timely:** Topics you care deeply about will seem relevant all the time. But what makes it relevant to people for whom your issue isn't the air they breathe? Be explicit about the timeliness of your argument by tying it to current affairs, a recent or upcoming event, or an emerging problem that is likely to get worse.
- **Be straightforward:** Avoid jargon. Keep sentences short. Break complex ideas down into multiple, shorter paragraphs. Generally speaking, most news outlets' style guides suggest writing is appropriate when it is easily understood at a 6th- to 8th-grade reading level.
- **Be a rule follower:** Each news outlet has its own parameters regarding op-eds. These include everything from the maximum word count to the way the letter should be submitted. Choosing not to follow these guidelines can significantly diminish the odds that your op-ed will be published.