



How to Prepare an Op-Ed

An Op-Ed (named for the print newspaper section, Opposite the Editorial) is a longer submission that must be timely, relevant to the outlet, and stand out. Organizations often submit op-eds that are not picked up, so here's a checklist to save you time and ensure that you only write and submit an op-ed when appropriate.

Characteristics of an Op-Ed

Purpose	To raise awareness about an important issue that is not talked about often.
Target Audience	Local paper and readers
Document Length	<750 words

CHOOSING A TOPIC

Op-eds should be reserved for topics that are important and need to be addressed immediately. When deciding on a topic, choose one that you can passionately write about. This will aid in getting your point across effectively.

FORMATTING & STYLE

- **Use very short paragraphs that take up 4-5 lines maximum, similar to a blog post.**
- **Use an attention-grabbing headline.** Remember, you need to catch the op-ed editor's attention first and preferably with one email. They are reading hundreds of op-ed submissions a day; ensure yours stands out to them and not just to their readers. Many editors will only read your opening paragraph, so make it count with a news hook, an important current event, or a compelling story.
- **Keep your submission to ~550 words maximum and definitely no more than 750 words.** Be sure to check the submission criteria before submitting your op-ed.

PITCHING YOUR PIECE

- **Pitch the news outlet that is right for your goals.** This does not mean the paper needs to agree with you, it just means to pitch as local as you can. Local papers are best when interested in addressing something happening in your community because it is relevant to their readers and they are likely getting fewer pitches.
- **Send a mindful email to the editor.** The email message asking an editor to read your op-ed (which is usually also pasted in the body of the email unless they have an online form submission) is just as important as the op-ed itself.
 - » Use your best content in the 250-word maximum pitch email.
 - » You can repeat parts of your op-ed and spoil the ending because your pitch email is not being published, but it will hopefully get the editor to read your whole op-ed before deciding.
 - » If the author of the op-ed can personally submit it and briefly state their credentials, that also gives you a slight leg up.
- **Follow up the next day!** Check in to see if an editor has made a decision on your piece (phone calls are effective). If you do not hear back, send an additional polite email saying you are moving on to another outlet, so they know it is no longer exclusive to them.

Visit us at endtobaccoca.ash.org for more information.