Writing Op-Eds

Op-Ed Style Advice

- Check your local paper for word limits, but generally stay under 700 words (note, LTEs are even shorter, generally under 250 words).

- The first sentence must catch the reader's attention.

- Use a narrative style. Stories with characters, personal perspective, and a plot are...
memorable.

- Get specific. Cite an issue and how it will affect you and your community.

- Keep your sentences and paragraphs short, and keep the story moving. Each paragraph should range from three to five sentences.

- Edit your prose. Rewrite “There is/are” sentences. Look at every word ending in -ly and eliminate most if not all of the adverbs. Convert passive voice sentences to active ones. Look critically at all your metaphors, similes and pet phrases to make sure they are not clichés. Translate all jargon into English.

- If possible, have someone with values similar to your target audience read and provide feedback.

- Use timely references, colorful language, and metaphors to get the reader's attention.

- Don't just state facts, explain those facts with a story!

- Look at your district and interests of your congressperson to see where you may be able to move the needle, then try to craft a story around that issue. What is in that district? A hospital that is very important for people? A lab providing jobs? Is there an anti-science bill that will have a negative impact on the local economy or health?

- If applicable, have the pod work together to draft the piece, but identify a point-person to lead the effort. Be prepared to rewrite after
OP-ED TEMPLATE

1. First paragraph: The first sentence must grab the reader's attention. You should explain what the key issue is (science funding in the budget, using science to make regulations) and highlight why this is relevant to your community or district. End with a statement about what you are trying to tell your audience (e.g. “this is why we need to increase government spending for science and research - to produce a better society and improve our lives”) (3-4 sentences)

2. Introduce yourself and connect with the audience: Who are you? What do you have in common with the people you are trying to reach (e.g. shared religion, blue collar upbringing). How do you share their underlying values (not why should they share your values) (1-2 paragraphs)

3. Make your case: How does the science you are writing about make society better? Muster your best two to four supporting arguments or data bits. Be as specific and as articulate as possible. This should relate to themes in the narrative portion of the piece, but can depart from the narrative form in writing and include a statistic or two. (2-3 paragraphs)

4. Lead with your points and avoid repeating the opposition's arguments. If you want to address their concerns, do so in a short 3rd paragraph, and then restate why your argument is ultimately more solid.
5. Conclusion: Bring it back to the story, end with the connection and a hopeful message.
   The last sentence should be memorable, make your overall message stick in the reader’s mind and re-iterate your most important point (1 paragraph).

PITCHING YOUR OP-ED TO YOUR LOCAL PAPER

1. Make sure your op-ed meets the format requirements of the paper (word length, etc.)

2. Submit on-line, but then call to follow-up and pitch it directly to the editors.
   - Emphasize why this is "timely." Editors will look at your pitch and think "Why now?" Point to anything that is particularly "news-y" or recent as the hook for your op-ed.
   - The pitch includes the length, and length with title and bio notes. It's a little insider-y but it shows the editor that you know what you're doing (even if you don't!).
   - Always offer to make edits or tweak. Maybe 10% of the time, an editor will like the idea but not the execution. Some will outright reject but this opens the door to them running something if it only take a few tweaks.

3. Be persistent with follow-ups until you get a clear yes or no. Don’t worry about annoying the editor, they’re bombarded by everyone.
Hello,

I'd like to submit an opinion piece on the proposed cuts to science and research for the fiscal year 2018 budget in xxx agency. I am a NJ native, PhD ecologist, and work as a Science & Technology Policy Fellow at AAAS. The goal of this piece is to explain why, as a scientist, government spending for science and research should increase because science produces a better society and improves our lives, how science impacts NJ, and to urge others to join in concern and protest. I am hoping it can be placed between X and Y date.

The piece is exclusive at 641 text/691 with title and bio notes. Happy to make any needed edits.

Home address:

Phone:

Thank you for your consideration,
<Your name>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- AAUW, When to Write a Letter to the Editor versus an Op-Ed (http://www.aauw.org/resource/lte-vs-op-ed/)

- Union of Concerned Scientists, Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor (http://www.ucsusa.org/action/science_network/letters-to-the-editor.html#.WWfUOoQrKUk)

- Union of Concerned Scientists, Writing Op-Eds
• The Op-Ed Project,
(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zIzfCVIggxeuc2UggkC04BMLWx-8bhFdnTsYVMCTrvo/edit)Op-Ed
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
Writing: Tips
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
and
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/)
Tricks
(https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics/) and check out their upcoming seminars
(https://www.theopedproject.org/seminars)

• American Geophysical Union, Sharing Science, OpEds

• AAAS, Writing an Op-Ed
(https://www.aaas.org/page/writing-op-ed)

• The New York Times, Op-Ed and You
(http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/opinion/op-ed-and-you.html)

• COMPASS, Op-Ed Writing: It's OK To Argue For Something