

*"We found that op-ed pieces have a lasting effect on people's views regardless of their political affiliation or their initial stance on an issue. People read an argument and were persuaded by it. It's that simple."*

– Yale University Study, 2018

- ① **ALWAYS TIE YOUR OP-ED TO A NEWS HOOK.** If you can see one coming, plan (and pitch your piece) ahead. If a story is breaking, submit within 24 hours. There has to be a compelling reason why an editor should run it now. Make that point directly in your pitch. Do not manufacture a hook. Chocolate Day or some obscure law's anniversary are not "natural" hooks. Editors want it to be relevant and are known to reject pieces based on tenuous hooks.
- ② **ALWAYS RESPECT THE WORD LIMIT.** Typically, 750 words will do. It is better if your piece is even shorter. Editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. If it's too long, it will very likely be rejected immediately.
- ③ **OPEN WITH A STRONG, TIGHT, CLEAR PARAGRAPH.** If the reader only reads two paragraphs, they should get your essential point. The middle paragraphs exist to reinforce the feeling that it is only sensible to agree with you.
- ④ **MAKE IT PERSONAL.** Tell a story. Invoke an experience. Make it readable and relevant. Audiences respond to accessible content and editors look for it.
- ⑤ **MAKE IT LOCAL.** With the exception of a small number of national outlets, there has to be a local tie-in. What is the relevance of the local Representative or the state's Senators? How will the decision make an impact on the community? What is the community history with the issue?
- ⑥ **WHAT'S FRESH, WHAT'S NEW?** Editors—and readers—are looking for something new and fresh. What is your unique add to the current debate? What special insight does your perspective as a subject matter expert or impacted person give you that the public should know?
- ⑦ **CHOOSE THE RIGHT MESSENGER.** On any given topic, some messengers have more persuasive credibility with the target audience than others. Who does your target audience listen to? Who do they respect? And who do they ignore? A relevant local writer is key with most regional and local newspapers. With national outlets, the prestige and credibility of the author can make all the difference.
- ⑧ **ARGUE A STRONG POINT—POWERFULLY.** An op-ed argues a point of view; it does not weigh all sides of an issue. As a general rule, make one strong point and back it up with 3–4 supporting arguments. Be sure your passion is compelling to your audience. Think of one person who represents the type of individual you are trying to persuade and write as if you are speaking to them.

- 9 **AVOID JARGON.** Your responsibility as a writer is to present ideas in the most accessible way. Avoid using words that require your reader to be an insider in your profession.
- 10 **NAME NAMES.** Policies don't just happen—people make decisions. In political communications, the aim is to declare who is responsible and why they should do the right thing. This does not need to be adversarial, but it cannot be vague or understated.
- 11 **PROVIDE A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION.** Give readers something to follow up on after reading the piece. Ending a piece with a line that echoes, "This is really terrible," can be both unsatisfying and disempowering for your reader. Think more along the lines of "To help you can..." or "Readers can call the House Judiciary Committee Chairman and insist..."
- 12 **USE VARIED TYPES OF EVIDENCE.** People tend to understand issues with the emotional part of their brain first, and the rational part of their brain second. Wherever possible, use metaphors, analogies, and stories to connect to your audience and make your point more persuasive. You can also point to trends, cite expert quotes, relate personal experiences, or cite statistics or findings from reports.