

Guidelines for Opinion Editorials and Letters to the Editors

Opinion Editorials:

Op-eds (“short for opposite the editorial page”) offer a chance to express your point of view on an issue relevant to your community. /they appear in a newspaper’s or website’s opinion section along with editorials by the newspaper’s editors. You can usually find instructions for submitting your op-ed on the opinion page of the paper, online (typically in the “opinion” section of the paper’s site), or by calling the newspaper and asking for the opinion editor or desk. Usually, op-eds are between 500 and 800 words, but check with your paper for any special requirements.

Letters to the Editor (LTE):

Letter to the editors are a chance for you to contribute to community conversation in your local newspaper. You can write in response to a specific article (if so, reference the article date and headline in your submission), or you can offer a new way of looking at an issue or idea. You can find instruction for submitting your letter on the opinion page of the paper, online (typically in the “opinion” section of the paper’s site), or by calling the newspaper and asking for the opinion editor or desk. Usually, letters to the editor should be no longer than 250 words.

Difference between Op Eds and LTE’s:

Op eds are usually longer, more thought out and with more elaboration on an argument. LTE’s are usually shorter and with a simple point. Sometimes they can consist of a simple thank you. LTE’s can be more personal.

Do’s and Don’ts:

- If you don’t hear from a publication, follow up with them in a day or two. Sometimes a phone call can improve chances of your piece getting picked up. You can call and simply ask if they received your article.
- Try not to submit an angry response to something that the newspaper published. Rather than write a reactive piece, try a proactive one. Try to focus on a local issue or local person.
- Format the subject line in the following manner: “Op-Ed: Birds are awesome.” Or “Letter to the Editor: Why we should care about birds.”

Southern California Publications:

In Southern California, the LA times is the most popular publication which makes submission and publication difficult. Consider pitching to a local daily newspaper. Some weekly newspapers do have op ed and LTE sections, while others don’t. If your local weekly does, it may be easier to get published in a weekly paper and should be considered. Those weeklies then to look more for op-eds.

Dailies:

The Southern California News Group owns 11 local daily newspapers that share content amongst each other. If your article is published in one paper, it might get shared across publications. These papers also have similar if not the same guidelines for publication. Here is the list of papers within this group:

- Orange County Register — www.ocregister.com; Opinion Page Editor, Brian Calle, bcalle@scng.com
- Los Angeles Daily News — www.dailynews.com (serving the Los Angeles Metropolitan area and the San Fernando Valley), Deputy opinion page editors, Mike Brossart, mbrossart@scng.com, also Brian Calle (above)
- Press-Enterprise — www.pe.com (serving Central and Western Riverside County); editorial page editor, Jim Sachetti, jim.sachetti@presenterprise.net
- Long Beach Press-Telegram — www.presstelegram.com; Mike Brossart, mbrossart@scng.com
- Pasadena Star-News — www.pasadenastarnews.com; Opinion Page Editor, Brian Calle, bcalle@scng.com
- San Gabriel Valley Tribune — www.sgvtribune.com; Opinion Page Editor, Brian Calle, bcalle@scng.com
- Whittier Daily News — www.whittierdailynews.com (serving Whittier and the Pico Rivera Area); Brossart and Calle, (above)
- San Bernardino Sun — www.sbsun.com (see website for instructions)
- Inland Valley Daily Bulletin — www.dailybulletin.com (serving Pomona Valley and Ontario) (Brossart and Calle)
- Redlands Daily Facts — www.redlandsdailyfacts.com
- Torrance Daily Breeze — www.dailybreeze.com (serving Torrance and the South Bay area) Brossart and Calle

Other local dailies that have different owners include:

- San Diego Tribune — www.sandiegouniontribune.com editorial page editor, Blanca Gonzalez, blanca.gonzalez@utsandiego.com
- Antelope Valley Press — www.avpress.com (currently changing ownership), editorial page editor, Charles Bostwick, cbostwick@avpress.com
- Santa Clarita Valley Signal — www.signalscv.com

These two dailies are owned by the same company (Gannett Company):

- Desert Sun — www.desertsun.com (serving Palm Springs and the surrounding Coachella Valley) Editorial page editor, Al Franco, al.franco@desertsun.com
- Ventura County Star — <http://www.vcstar.com/> opinion page editor, Terry Paulson, terry@terrypaulson.com

The Op Ed Project: <http://www.theopedproject.org> (Check out their resources page)

Tips for Op-Ed Writing

1. Own your expertise

Know what you are an expert in and why - but don't limit yourself. Consider the metaphors that your experience and knowledge suggest.

2. Stay current

Follow the news – both general and specific to your areas of specialty. If you write about Haiti, read the Haitian press. If you write about pop culture, read the media that cover it.

3. The perfect is the enemy of the good

In other words: write fast. You may have only a few hours to get your piece in before the moment is gone. But also...

4. Cultivate a flexible mind

Remember that a good idea may have more than one news hook, indeed if the idea is important enough it can have many. So keep an eye out for surprising connections and new news hooks – the opportunity may come around again.

5. Use plain language

Jargon serves a purpose, but it is rarely useful in public debate, and can obfuscate – sorry, I mean cloud – your argument. Speak to your reader in straight talk.

6. Respect your reader

Never underestimate your reader's intelligence, or overestimate her level of information. Recognize that your average reader is not an expert in your topic, and that the onus is on you to capture her attention – and make the argument compel.

How to Pitch

How do you get someone to listen to you in the first place? How do you establish credibility, capture interest, and convey the immediate relevance of your point of view – quickly and decisively? Pitching can happen in lots of ways, but very often it is done by email.

An effective email pitch answers these basic questions:

- Why now? What's the news hook? Why is this worth reading at this moment?
- So what? Why should people care?
- Why me? Why am I the best one to write this piece?

A pitch should also include:

- Your idea in a few lines
- Your credentials – only those that are relevant
- The finished piece pasted below your pitch
- Your contact information

Aspects of a successful pitch:

- Timely

- Well written
- Brief and clear
- Conveys expertise
- Unexpected point of view

Follow Up: If the editor responds:

- Thank your editor. Even if they said “no.” Remember that “no” can be the beginning of a conversation that can eventually lead to “yes.”
- If they published you, thank them not for showcasing you but for giving space to the ideas and issues.

Follow Up: If there is no response:

- Have a time limit. If your idea has a very short shelf life, you might give an editor a day or less to respond; if it’s evergreen, a week or two or more. Then send a follow-up email to the editor saying that you’d still like to run your piece in their publication, but since the piece is timely, if you don’t hear from them by the end of the day (week, whatever) you will assume they have passed, and you’ll be submitting your op-ed elsewhere.

Note: Most national newspapers will not consider your piece if you submit to more than one paper at the same time.