

TIPS ON WRITING AN OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Newspapers and news magazines typically offer two forums for citizens to express opinions, to provide information, and to advocate: Op-Ed (short for “opposite the editorial” page) pieces and Letters to the Editor. Information and advice are provided below to assist you in taking advantage of either, or both, of these forums.

General Information

- Newspaper editors select Op-Ed pieces and Letters to the Editor for publication based on interest to readers, originality of thought, timeliness, freshness of viewpoint, strength of the argument, and the writer’s expertise on the issue. If your Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor does not meet more than one of these criteria, it is less likely to be published.
- Most publications have guidelines for the submission of Op-Ed pieces and Letters to the Editor – usually printed on the opinion page(s) of the publication – so it’s important to check, and to comply with, the publication’s guidelines.
- Be sure that your piece is grammatically correct and contains no spelling errors. Don't rely on a spell checker – instead, have at least one other person read through it.
- Writing should be powerful, but must also appeal to a general audience, so use short paragraphs and avoid using a lot of flowery words and unfamiliar acronyms.
- Remember that once you submit your Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor, it's out of your hands. Publications retain the right to edit your piece and readers are free to criticize or contradict your assertions. So be certain of your facts and be sure you have clearly expressed yourself. A good rule of thumb is to write the piece and then set it aside for one day before giving the piece a final review and then submitting it.

Tips on Writing an Op-Ed:

- An Op-Ed may be written and submitted at any time and on any subject, though Op-Eds that address current events or “hot topics” tend to garner greater readership and are more likely to be published.
- Unless the publication’s guidelines say otherwise, an Op-Ed should be 600-900 words in length.
- Op-ed pieces are published with a headline and your name in the byline. It is fine for you to include a headline for your Op-Ed but be aware that, depending on available space and other factors, the publication’s editors may not use it.
- Pieces should express a single, clear point of view and be supported by facts and statistics. Make your main points early in the piece and end your piece with a clear statement of what you want readers to do or think in response to your Op-Ed.
- After the conclusion of your Op-Ed, provide a sentence or two about yourself. For example: "John Doe is a Doe County School Board member who was first elected in 2008." Also include a means for readers to contact you such as your cell phone, office phone, and/or email address.

Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor

- A Letter to the Editor are best used to quickly express opinions, state a position, and/or correct misinformation ***in response*** to something that has recently appeared in a news article, an editorial, an Op-Ed piece, or earlier Letter to the Editor.
- Unless the publication's guidelines say otherwise, Letters should be about 250 - 300 words in length and should begin with "To the Editor".
- The vast majority of Letters to the Editor are never published because of a lack of space, a lack of interest, and/or a lack of originality, so it is especially important that your Letter provides a fresh perspective, specific information, and exhibits expertise that would not be found in other submissions.
- Writing a Letter to the Editor forces you to be brief and to make your points plainly and concisely. Don't waste space with unnecessary introductory statements such as "I am writing in response to your April 10 article on the district's dress code policy." Instead, dive in with the main point of your Letter – "Your April 10 article on the district's dress code policy contained some factual errors."
- Letters to the Editor are always signed so, at a minimum, your name will appear at the end of your letter. Depending on the publications policies, your title and contact information may also be included after your name.
- Make it clear that you're writing for yourself, not the entire school board. However, if the Letter to the Editor is submitted by the entire board, the letter should state that fact and all board members should sign the letter.