



## Tips for Opinion Editorials (Op-eds)

Guest commentaries (op-eds) are articles that appear opposite the editorial page of local, state and national newspapers.

- Research the newspaper to understand what kind of editorials it publishes, its political leanings, editorial direction and the issues it covers.
- Understand that all op-eds must relate directly to the scope of the newspaper. For example, *NYTimes* – national and international news. *Albany Times Union* – state capital. *Troy Record* – mid-sized paper for industrial town. *The Eagle* – small paper for Village of Cambridge, New York. You have multiple options for placing your op-ed.
- Find out the newspaper's guidelines for op-ed submissions, especially word count, and follow them. Most op-eds are only 600 to 700 words long.
- Conceive your idea in response to a news event, an article in the newspaper, or another opinion piece. It is vital that you submit your piece within two to three days from the piece you are referring to, as it will take a few days for the newspaper to decide on your submission and to print. Most do not print op-eds more than a week after the original article or event.
- Identify yourself as a scientist/chemist and clearly point out the role of science and chemistry in understanding and solving issues that are important to the readers. One of your strongest tools is your integrity as a scientist. Connect your points to your expertise in simple, layperson's terms.
- Stay focused on one issue, and boil your argument down to three, or fewer, major points.
- Explain these points using concrete examples, as much as possible. Ground your ideas in real, easily described scenarios.
- Use concrete language:
  - "MRI" instead of "medical devices"
  - "discoveries, such as new medicines" rather than "discoveries like nano-derived pharmaceuticals"
  - "substances that make chemical reactions proceed more quickly" rather than "catalysts"
- Think creatively and be original; a newspaper will not publish a story unless it feels the piece presents a unique or different perspective. Provoke discussion, controversy and response.

- Include at least one memorable, *short* phrase (sound bite) that can be used as a “pull” quote. (Take a look at these wonderful science sound bites (not to be repeated, but to be used as examples for how to say something pithy):  
<http://www.pinterest.com/ouhoscurator/scientist-sound-bites/>
  - “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so we may fear less.” Marie Curie
  - “The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.” Einstein
  - “What is a scientist after all? It is a curious man looking through a keyhole, the keyhole of nature, trying to know what’s going on.” Jacques Yves Cousteau
- Highlight the issue's relevance. How/why has it been in the news? What is the controversy?
- Use clear, active sentences. Make your writing interesting, but direct. Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Eliminate the passive voice: for example, change “This legislation was defeated almost entirely by the governor.” to “The governor single-handedly defeated the bill.”
- Consider beginning with a short vignette that illustrates how the issue affects an individual or group of people to drive home why the newspaper's readers “need to know.” The first two sentences must be interesting enough for the editor and readers to keep reading. If it isn't interesting, it won't be accepted.
- For regional placement, use local or regional statistics and, if possible, relate to the national or international scope of the issue.
- Close on a strong note. Use a short, powerful last paragraph that drives the point home and sums things up. It's best if you can leave readers with a point that will keep them thinking.
- Include a cover letter when submitting an op-ed that summarizes why it is timely and of interest to readers of this particular publication. Thank the editors for considering your piece. Keep the letter short - two paragraphs. If submitting via email, make the ‘cover letter’ two paragraphs after your salutation, then drop a couple of lines, and begin the title and op-ed itself. *Do not submit op-eds as attachments! Editors may not open them.*
- Thank the editor, or person you dealt with, when your op-ed piece has been published. Email is nice, but a handwritten note is more likely to be remembered the next time you want to place an op-ed.