



## University of Washington Op-Ed Training

### How to Write An OpEd

Opinion editors are busy people with bosses and audiences to please. They want pieces that are ready to publish and that tell timely, unique, credible, powerful stories using words and rhetorical techniques that connect to their publication's audience. If you think about what editors need, writing OpEds can be fun and effective.

When you write, do these things...

1. Make it easy for your editor. When you ask students to write a two-page brief, and they give you a five page paper instead, do you like it? Neither do editors. Always abide by length and format guidelines. Google "how to submit an oped to [name of paper]" to get started. And write with the style of your chosen target publication in mind. Take a look at their Opinion page to see what they like.
2. Hook your reader right away. Great OpEds grab readers' (and editors) attention at the start. The first 25 words must convince readers to stop browsing and read the piece.
3. Tell vivid stories about real people. OpEds are the opposite of abstracts. And use the first-person "I" to connect those stories to yourself and your research. In the *Raleigh News & Observer*, sociologist Helen Marrow wrote "Consider Eduardo, an undocumented immigrant I interviewed in 2003 while I was writing a book on immigration and race in the South..."
4. Use plain, simple language. OpEds are meant for wide audiences. No jargon, no acronyms, and no words like "legitimates" or "deconstruct".
5. Consider an OpChart. A striking chart or table can help get your article published.
6. Write alone. Opinion editors almost never accept pieces with more than one author. They don't have time for the hassle of dealing with multiple authors. If you want to mention your research collaborators, do so in the body of the piece.
7. Or make it a very odd couple. Editors might accept an OpEd co-authored by a scholar and a civic leader, explaining a common perspective on a key issue.
8. Include hyperlinks. Links are good.
9. OpEds never have footnotes. Including them shows your editor that you are unfamiliar with the format.
10. Be timely. Editors are always looking for a very good quick response to the news of the day. Very good and quick will get published -- absolutely perfect and too slow will not.

11. So be ready. Write the nugget of a piece, hold it for the moment your issue is in the news, and then jump fast to adapt what you have send something in. Or find ways to connect your topic to the urgent news of the day. You can also use upcoming events like holidays or anniversaries of famous historical events to tie your topic to the moment.
12. Take advantage of relationships to submit OpEds. If you know someone (like the SSN staff) who has a relationship with an editor, have them help you submit.

### *Targeting*

An OpEd is not always the best way to communicate, of course. Strategic communications proceeds from objectives to targets to strategies, messages, and tactics. Think about it this way:

- What change do you want to make in the world?
- Who are the decision makers who can make the change?
- What do those decision makers care about?
- What media outlets do they consume?
- What types of pieces do those media outlets run?
- What messages might persuade your decision maker to take the action you want?

If the decision makers are elected officials, you may want to think not just about what media they consume, but also what media their key stakeholders and constituents consume.

*Grassroots organizations and policymakers pay attention to OpEds.*

OpEds can be a great way to let a grassroots group or policymaker know that you support something they are working on. Mentioning the group or policymaker by name can be a a powerful move.

### *A note about the New York Times*

The New York Times opinion page is a different animal than all other OpEd pages. Most OpEd pages offer opinions to supplement the official unsigned editorial voice of the paper itself. The NYT opinion page doesn't do that. Instead, the page offers a place to tell a specific story that has never been told, or to offer a new analysis or new idea. It is a great place to break research, through an exclusive OpEd that coincides with the publication a new book or paper you have written. The NYT has pretty much the only opinion page editors left in the business who will work with you on extensive edits if they like the piece. They may also take your piece, say that they will publish it soon, and hold it for months, and then change their minds. The NYT rejects 97% of all OpEds submitted. On the other hand, an NYT piece is a great way to get colleagues and other academics to learn more about your work.

### **Submission**

Generally, you can only offer your OpEd to one publication at a time, unless you are approaching regional news media in different regions that do not compete with each other.

Always include your full contact information and a very brief explanation of why you are a credible authority on the issue at hand. Websites sometimes request high-resolution photos of authors as well. When submitting an OpEd, include a bio line. If you haven't heard from the editor a few days after submission, give them a call or send them an email to be sure they read it.

### **After Publication**

Always send a thank you note to the editor.

Share, share, share your piece. Share the piece with your university's press department and with any professional associations you may be part of, if appropriate. Share the piece on social networks like Facebook and Twitter – and tag SSN. Our twitter handle is @SSNScholars. We use the hashtag #ssnpoli.

Use the OpEd to introduce yourself to new contacts or strengthen relationships. If an article backs a specific policy, supportive policymakers or civic groups may want to see and share it. OpEds can help persuade undecided decision-makers as well. Consider sharing your published OpEd with policymakers and their staffers, members of the press, and civic groups working on your issue.

### **For more assistance, join the Scholars Strategy Network.**

The purpose of the Scholars Strategy Network is to help researchers become powerful players in the policy process in order to encourage the use of research and evidence to improve public policy and strengthen democracy. The SSN national staff members help scholars create relationships with policymakers, civic leaders, and journalists. They also edit and place a lot of OpEds. Member-led chapters are driving university communities to encourage and reward civic engagement by scholars and students alike, while bringing together diverse groups of people to use research to improve policy.

[Thanks for reading down this far.](#)

### **[Republican Health Plans Could Have Devastating Consequences for Your Teeth](#)**

[Donald Chi](#)

*The Washington Post*, March 1, 2017

### **[Let the Evidence Have Its Day in Policymaking](#)**

[Carolyn J. Heinrich](#)

*The Hill*, June 16, 2016

**[Black Women and Girls in California Have Had to Make a Lot of Lemonade](#)**

[Marcus Anthony Hunter](#), Nourbese Flint

*Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 1, 2016

**[In Texas, Attacking Science Has Hurt Women's Health Care](#)**

[Wendy Chavkin](#)

*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 3, 2016

**[Hungry, Homeless and in College](#)**

[Sara Goldrick-Rab](#), [Katharine Broton](#)

*New York Times*, December 4, 2015

**[Transgender Americans Deserve Protection](#)**

[Eric Anthony Grollman](#)

*USA Today*, March 7, 2016

**[To Reduce Inequality, Reinvest in CUNY](#)**

[Nicholas Freudenberg](#), Michelle Fine, Meena Alexander

*Crain's New York Business*, February 26, 2016

**[While America Tweets, China Soars](#)**

[Thomas F. Remington](#)

*The Washington Post*, December 19, 2013