



EveryChild California's Guide to Writing an Op-Ed

An op-ed is an opinion piece written by an individual who is not an employee of the newspaper. Submitting a letter to the editor of your local paper is a quick and easy way to educate members of your community about an issue. Op-eds are a great advocacy tool and a way to raise awareness about children's issues – if published, they are read by decision makers, opinion leaders and fellow citizens. Legislators often pay close attention to the local papers in their district to keep track of their constituents' views and concerns.

Your local newspaper probably has specific guidelines for submitting a letter posted on their editorial page. If not, call the editorial office and ask. Follow their procedures exactly. Be sure, when you sign the letter, to include your full name and contact information. Although the paper will only print the name of your town, they may need to contact you with questions or edits before the letter goes into print. After you mail or email your letter, call the paper to find out if it was received and when it will be printed.

Here are some quick tips for writing an effective Op-Ed piece:

- Find out the length requirements and submission deadlines for op-eds for your local newspapers. In general, op-eds should range from 500-800 words, but each paper has different requirements. Keep your message clear, concise, and on topic. Shorter letters get printed and clearly written letters get read.
- Provide a very brief one to two sentence biography to give readers some context and background showing how you know about the issue. ("I am the executive director of XYZ Child Care and we provide care and services to over 150 children in our community..")
- State the problem and why you are concerned about it. Research any state or local issues or stories that have recently been published concerning the issue. You should refer to these articles to show the relevance of the op-ed (such as "Last week's story about the problems that many local families face when they don't have licensed child care for their children while they go to work underscores the need for quality child care for every child...").



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- Use state and local statistics throughout the op-ed to support your point of view. Include your personal story and provide details that make it more real for the reader.
- Offer a solution to the issue, both general and specific.
- Wrap it up with a final statement of why this issue is so important. The more personal you make it, the more powerful.
- Once the op-ed is written, you should submit it online or via fax, whichever way the newspaper says it prefers to be contacted. A few days after you submit the piece, follow up with a phone call to see if they received it and if they might be interested in running it.



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