



Take Action: Write Your Own Op-ed

Writing an op-ed is an impactful way to support conservation, speak directly to your community, influence public dialogue, and show decision-makers that people are paying attention to threats facing local lands and waters. The best part is that you don't have to be a professional writer to do it. Newspapers welcome op-ed submissions from everyday people, especially those with a personal connection to the issue. Here are some tips and tricks to help you get started.

What is an op-ed?

An op-ed, short for “opposite the editorial page,” is an opinion article submitted from an outside contributor that appears in the editorial section of a newspaper, magazine, or website.

Typically, an op-ed highlights an opinion focused on an issue that is timely and relevant to the audience.

Purpose

Op-eds present opportunities for independent voices and organizations — outside of the publication's team — to express opinions, perspectives, and arguments about various issues. This provides the space for influencing public discourse, making op-eds useful tools for conservation advocacy.

Characteristics

- Typically 500 – 700 words (concise by nature)
- Have a clearly defined thesis and point of view, supported by evidence of clear thinking and research
- Contain the unique voice of the writer and their opinion
- Inform, incite public debate, and persuade (e.g. persuade the audience to take action)

Tone and Language

- Usually a persuasive and conversational tone
- Clear, concise language
- Understand and match language to your audience (use language that will be understandable by a general public audience – think grade 6 level of knowledge)
- Can get creative (e.g. use irony and wit to get your point across)
- Can provide counter arguments and rebuttals, assuring readers you've considered both sides (e.g. use language like: "Some might argue... however, ... " "While it can be said that..." "There is a widely held belief that... but..."")

Structure

Title	This should be something catchy and related to the topic of your opinion article to draw in the reader (you can often suggest a title, but publications will sometimes add their own)
Photo	Similar to the title, this should draw in the reader and showcase your topic (you can sometimes provide a photo, but publications will often add their own)
Author	Your name!

Introduction

- Hook: Introductory sentence(s) to engage the reader (often referred to as the lede)
- Thesis: Statement of argument – can be either explicit or implied, but should be clear regardless
- Backstory: Often times, the author will use the introduction to tie in their personal backstory (this is a good opportunity to introduce who you are as the writer i.e. how you connect to the issue at hand)

Body

- Often divided into 3-4 sections presenting the main arguments and/or points of evidence to support the thesis.
- Can use a combo of facts, quotations, citations, and/or data from sources and personal observations to back up your opinions (opinions are more persuasive if backed by solid research).

Conclusion

- Connect back to the introduction (e.g. your lede and thesis).
 - Contains the final epiphany and/or call to action (calls to action are incredibly important piece in a conservation opinion article).
 - Usually includes a catchy, powerful closing statement.
 - Remember – this is the final memorable detail the reader will gather.
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Writing an Op-Ed

Time to put pen to paper! Ask yourself...

Who is my audience?

a. Who am I trying to persuade? Who will likely see my opinion article based on where I am submitting it? It is important to understand your audience to determine the type of language to use and how to best get your point across.

b. Consider...

i. Values – What is important to my audience? Is there a clear benefit to reading your opinion article? How can you present info that is clear and interesting to the audience?

ii. Attitudes – Could your audience have biases or preconceptions about the issues? Can these be managed? How might you do this?

iii. Understanding of the Issue – Is this a new issue? What might your audience already know? What might need more explaining?

Who am I as a writer?

a. Opinion articles can be written by anyone, whether you are an expert or not. Regardless, it is good to understand the perspective you bring, and it can be useful to clarify this for your audience.

b. Consider...

i. Are you writing as a subject matter expert? Is the issue related to your education and/or area of career expertise?

ii. Are you writing as a witness or someone directly affected by the issue? Is the issue something you are personally connected to? Can you tie in testimony of how the issue has affected you or someone close to you?

iii. Are you writing as a practitioner, filling the space between witness and expert? Can you use your knowledge of how the issue has affected others around you and evidence to back up your argument effectively?

Do I have a clear thesis?

- a. Thesis – What is the theory/point I am attempting to prove?
- b. Do I have a clear point to make? What is it? Why should people care?
- c. Remember to keep your thesis in mind throughout the entire process of writing your opinion article.

Can I back up my thesis?

- a. Topic – The issue that is the focus of my opinion article
 - i. Do I understand the topic I am writing about?
- b. Consider...
 - i. Have I done enough research about my topic?
 - ii. Do I have all of my sources prepared to back up my arguments?

Are there any format specifications I need to follow?

- a. Some opinion articles list rules for publication (make sure to review these prior to writing)
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Submitting an Op-Ed

Different media outlets may have different submission requirements and mechanisms. This is a general overview of what to include in a typical email submission. For specific requirements, visit the news source website you are hoping to submit to and find the op-ed submission instructions page.

1. Subject line, which states "Topic - Opinion article Submission"
2. Full name
3. Address
*This information typically won't be published
4. Contact information (phone number and email address)
*This information typically won't be published
5. Credentials and/or backstory (i.e. why you're writing the opinion article)
6. 1-2 sentence summary of your opinion article
7. Include your opinion article directly in your email text (do not include as an attachment)

Let us know!

If your op-ed gets published, we'd love to hear about it! Get in touch at infosab@cpaws.org.

Additional Resources

- [How to Write an Opinion article or Column \(Harvard Kennedy School\)](#)
- [How to Write an Opinion article: A Step by Step Guide \(The Learning Agency\)](#)
- [What is an Opinion article in Journalism? You Should Know \(the Knowledge Academy\)](#)
- [How to Write an Impactful Opinion article \(University of Chicago\)](#)
- [Opinion article Writing: Tips and Tricks \(The Opinion article Project\)](#)
- [What Citations Do Op Eds Use: Essential Guidelines - Free Cite Generator](#)

Opinion Article Examples:

- [Coal mining on the Rocky Mountain's Eastern Slopes – if trout could talk | Rocky Mountain News](#)
- [Government reluctantly holds coal hearing, but aren't really listening | Calgary Herald](#)
- [Banff hydrogen train would increase visitors and environmental impacts | Calgary Herald](#)
- [Calgary city council must start walking the talk on climate change and biodiversity | LiveWire Calgary](#)
- [Lack of science from Alberta's forestry and parks minister | Rocky Mountain News](#)
- [Jasper: Learning from the burning | Rocky Mountain News](#)