

# Writing: Op-Eds

## *Providing Opinions That Matter*

*Turning Academic Publications into Perspectives for the  
General Public*

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# My Background

- Jerry McKinstry
  - Former reporter, columnist and editor for The Journal News and Newsday.
  - Was a member of Newsday's Editorial Board that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.
  - Commentator with News12 & FIOS 1 News.
  - Former Deputy Communications Director for Westchester County.
  - Ran media on political campaigns.
  - Currently runs all media efforts for Pace University in Westchester.

# How do you get press?

Two main ways:

- Ride the news wave – contribute to the stories reporters and editors are already interested in by being an expert in that subject area.
- Create the news wave – convince reporters or editors to write a story they weren't planning on writing.

# How to ride the news wave:

- Find a breaking/developing news story you have expertise in.
- Be available and responsive.
- Quick quote to share your perspective pushed out to reporters and news desks.
- Respond to inbound requests for experts.
- Maximize social platforms (LinkedIn, Twitter); post POVs, comment on/RT reporter posts
- **Submit an op-ed on the topic.**

# What is an Op-Ed?

- **Op(posite)-Ed(itorial) Page ...**
- Originally created for opposing opinions
- Provide equal time and space for opinions that contrast with views of Editorial Board
- Respond to current topics in the news
- Provide insight-opinions of experts in a field
  - Health
  - Politics
  - International Affairs
  - Environment

# What is an Op-Ed? ... cont.

- "Anything can be an Op-Ed." -- Trish Hall, the former Op-Ed and Sunday Review editor for NYT.
- Personal or explanatory essays, commentary on news events, reflections on cultural trends and more are all welcome.

# Characteristics of an Op-Ed?

- It is short: typically between 600 and 800 words.
- Has a clearly defined point of view or opinion
- It contains the strong, unique voice of the writer.
- Opinion is strong, and any criticisms are fair
- Must be well-written with a fact-based viewpoint.
- (Having an opinion isn't enough ... you must back it up with facts, examples & anecdotes.)
- Use your research

# Characteristics of an Op-ed

- Topical & Timely
- Theme is relevant, interesting
- Bolder is better
- Tells a story (preferably with people; numbers can support argument)
- Provides unique insight into an issue
- General or obvious opinions likely won't get picked up



# What makes a good op-ed?

- Should offer a fresh perspective or analysis of the issue.
- Don't equivocate
  - Be Bold
  - Don't be soft
  - Don't take opposing positions
  - Don't contradict yourself
- Must be timely – news changes within hours.
- But simultaneously should pass the test of time.

# What *else* makes a good op-ed?

- Loose formula:
  - Set it up - the news topic / issue you're writing about
  - Knock it down – explain what's wrong or a different perspective
  - Replace it – either a better understanding or a better way of doing something
  - Ask yourself: Would I read this? Why should anyone else?

# Tools

- Your research
- Interesting anecdotes and real life examples
- Facts, data, stats and information
- Quotes ... sources (can complement the data and drive home the message)

# The Challenge

- Academic articles typically aren't meant for the general public. Op-Eds typically are.
- Academic articles often result from years of study. Findings may not coincide for media or public's appetite for topic.
- Academic articles are typically much longer. Op-eds can be anywhere from 500-1,200 words (usually somewhere in between, depending on publication).

# The Solution

- Find a news hook; something that ties into a news topic, current trend and something in the public eye.
- Make a compelling argument for why people should be interested in the topic.
- Be forward looking.
- Edit, re-write, and target a general audience.
- Write a piece as if you were explaining to a student and layperson who knows little about the topic.
- Think of an op-ed as an educational opportunity. It's a virtual lesson.

# Some basics

- Every sentence should have a point
- Every sentence should advance the argument or story.
- The more complex the concept, the simpler the language.
- Don't take on too big a topic: Narrow focus, if necessary.
- End should tie back to the beginning.

# Targeting a Publication, Then Submitting

- Target outlet informs the piece – if target is the Journal News, then tie to the area.
- If the WSJ, must be national or international, and have business angle.
- New York Times is the Holy Grail, and very competitive.
- KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE
- You can submit to only one news outlet at a time; this can sometimes mean losing precious days, so best to be realistic.
- Some outlets are more responsive than others.

# Questions???