



A Guide to Writing Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Writing Letters To the Editor (LTEs) and Op-Eds are both powerful tools to influence public opinion, respond to news, and advocate for change. This guide will help you craft and place an LTE or Op-Ed and make your voice heard on critical issues.

What's the difference between an LTE and an Op-Ed?

- A Letter to the Editor (LTE) is a short, direct response to a specific news or opinion article published by the same publication. It should be timely, concise, and under 200 words.
- An Op-Ed is a longer, standalone opinion piece that allows you to explore an issue in depth — issues like major news developments, community activities, court rulings, etc. It requires a strong perspective on a relevant topic and is typically 500-800 words.

How do I craft my LTE/Op-Ed?

Before you start, answer these questions to help guide you:

- Is my topic timely and relevant?
- What is the main argument I want to make in a sentence?
- Why is my voice or perspective important on this issue?

What are some tips that I should consider when writing my piece?

- Don't be afraid to share the reason why you care about the issue. Using your own personal story makes your piece more compelling, engaging, and credible. When deciding between two similar op-eds or LTEs, outlets will almost always choose the one with a personal story or connection.
- State your main point early and support your arguments with facts, data, and/or a powerful story.
- Make sure to include *how* people can take action on this issue. Tell readers what you want them to do to get involved, whether that is voting, visiting a website, donating, contacting their elected officials, etc.
- Look up the publication's rules/guidelines for their LTE/Op-Ed submissions. Always adhere to the publications' guidelines for word count, formatting, and submission. These are typically included on the LTE/Op-Ed submission page of the publication's website. Every publication is different, so it's important that you do your research.

What does a Letter to the Editor (LTE) outline look like?

- **Paragraph 1:** Immediately reference the article you're responding to and state your main point. Express your concern or appreciation. This is where you tie your issue to the article in question, take a stance, or correct any errors or misrepresentations. Explain your key point within the first few sentences to keep the reader engaged.
- **Paragraph 2:** Briefly explain your connection to the issue and why readers should care. Use a key statistic, highlight the real-world impact, or share a personal story. End here with a clear call to action.
- **Closing Paragraph:** In one or two sentences, recap your point and reiterate action items for readers, including where they can find more information on how to get involved.

What does an Op-Ed outline look like?

- **Introduction:** Grab the reader's attention with something compelling like a personal story, a surprising statistic, or a connection to a timely event.
- **Your Argument:** Introduce your main argument and explain the problem. This is where you tell the audience why they should care.
- **Build Your Case:** Build your argument in a couple of paragraphs with 2-3 supporting points, using evidence like data, expert quotes, or real-life examples.
- **Closing:** End with a strong, memorable call to action that echoes your introduction.
- **Title:** Finally, review your piece and write a clear, catchy title that reflects your argument.

Ok, I wrote an Op-Ed/LTE. Now how do I get it published?

For LTEs

- Since you are responding to another piece, you want to submit your response within 1-2 days of the original article.
- Publications often have a dedicated email address to send letters to; this email address can typically be found on the “Opinion” or “LTE” page of the publication’s website.
- Craft a short email message with your letter attached. That message can be something like: *“Hello, I am submitting the attached LTE in response to [article title]. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you, [First and Last Name, City/State].”*
- If they want any specific information included with the submission, make sure to include that, but in general keep it short.

For Op-Eds

- Landing an op-ed in a large, national outlet can be difficult and time consuming unless you have a big-name author to pen it or a uniquely poignant perspective. Moreover, state or local outlets may more directly reach the audiences you’re trying to communicate with to achieve your goal. Generally, the recommendation is to pitch your op-ed to local outlets instead because it will be easier to place and will more directly reach those audiences that a large, national outlet will not.
- Option 1: Look up the newspaper's opinion editor on their website. For smaller, local papers there is often only one opinion editor, but if there is more than one, determine who the most appropriate person to pitch to is based on their area of focus. You have a higher likelihood of response if you send your piece to a person rather than a general opinion email or through an online submission form. Once you have the correct email address, craft a short email with your full op-ed attached. In 1-2 short paragraphs, summarize your main argument, your credentials, and why the piece is timely.
- Option 2: Some publications have a “Submit” section on their opinion page. You can follow the prompts and copy/paste or attach your op-ed. Follow their technical requirements and instructions carefully.
- Submit to one publication at a time, starting with your top target. If you get rejected 2-3 times, consider revising your piece or trying a different publication. Not all pieces will get published but keep trying!