



## Top 10 tips for writing op-eds that get published

By Sandra Beckwith, [www.nonprofitpublicity.com](http://www.nonprofitpublicity.com)

Op-eds - essays that appear opposite the editorial pages of newspapers - are powerful communications tools for nonprofit organizations working to influence public policy or initiate change. But too many local nonprofits miss some of their best opportunities to inform readers through these opinionated essays.

National headline news stories give nonprofits the hook their opinion pieces need to catch an editorial page editor's attention, but nonprofits don't always take advantage of this because they can't react quickly enough to write and place an essay when it's still timely.

Have at least one op-ed written in advance to use when a news event brings the op-ed's topic to the public's attention. When news breaks, customize it for the situation so it appears fresh and timely and send it out quickly so it can be used immediately.

Here are 10 tips for writing effective op-eds you can update according to the news story for immediate publication:

1. **Read the publication you're submitting to.** You want to be familiar with its style and tone as well as the types of op-eds it typically runs.
2. **Introduce yourself** to your newspaper's op-ed page editor by telephone or e-mail and request the publication's op-ed guidelines. Then follow them.
3. **Determine your goal.** What do you want to achieve through your op-ed? Do you want people to behave differently or take a specific action? Keep this goal in mind as you write.
4. **Select one message** to communicate. Op-eds are short - typically 800 words or less - so you have room to make just one good point.
5. **Be controversial.** Editors like essays with strong opinions that will spark conversation.
6. **Illustrate how the topic or issue affects readers.** Put a face on the issue by starting your essay with the story of somebody who has been affected or begin with an attention-getting statistic.
7. **Describe the problem and why it exists.** This is often where you can address the opposing viewpoint and explain your group's perspective.
8. **Offer your solution to the problem** and explain why it's the best option.
9. **Conclude on a strong note** by repeating your message or stating a call to action.
10. **Add one or two sentences at the end that describe your credentials** as they relate to the topic.

When your issue is suddenly making headlines, write an introduction that connects the news to your essay and e-mail it to the editor quickly.