



The Art of Writing Op-Eds

In Eight Steps



What is an op-ed?

- A piece of writing published in a media outlet that expresses the opinion of the author.
- Op-eds are different from editorials and letters to the editor.
- Op-eds are also known as voices columns, commentary or thought pieces.

The Overview

1. What is your narrative?
2. Who is your audience?
3. What is your goal?
4. Lead with values. Start with an idea or experience that others can see themselves in.
5. Focus on lived experience. Describing lived experience is more powerful than abstractions, ie Voter who voted as soon they turned 18 or got their citizenship papers vs. First-time voter.
6. Emphasize the ends. People are more moved by how something will affect them than the details of policy.
7. Name the causes/villians.
8. Link the problem to the solution. Let's give readers a theory for change. ie Make a plan. Vote.



ONE: FOCUS. FOCUS. FOCUS.

What is the piece about?



- Lede: Write a thematic statement that explains what the piece is about. All the elements/moments/anecdotes/solutions in the piece are in service to that statement.

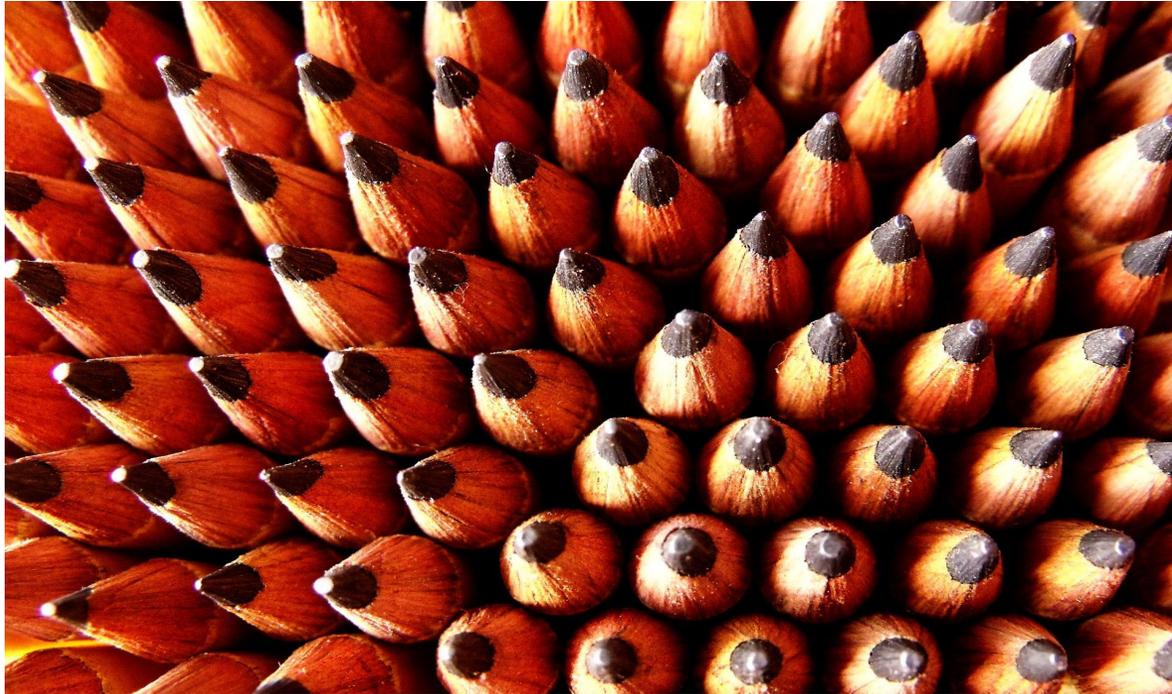
- EXAMPLES:

This piece is about how we can only invest in solutions to homelessness if we stop stereotyping people experiencing homelessness.

This piece is about why households headed by single Black mothers make up one of the largest demographics of people experiencing homelessness.

TWO: GET TO THE POINT

Readers won't wait long: About three seconds



- Make one point.
- Make it well.
- You have 750-850 words. You won't solve all the problems with this one op-ed.
- Let readers know in the top TWO paragraphs the main point of the piece.
- **PRO TIP:** Think in headlines. What's the headline of your piece?

THREE: CONTEXT

So what?



- Why should readers care?
- Why are you writing about this now?
- Is it timely?
- **PRO TIP:** The best time to get published is when the issue is in the news and you are among the first presenting your take on it. This sets the narrative on the issue.

FOUR: SHOW DON'T TELL

Put people in the moment



- Focus on lived experience.
- Use anecdotes.
- Share your story and how the issue affects you and others.
- Describe what you see, hear, smell.
- Put people in the moment you are describing.

FIVE: LOGIC AND ORDER

Not everyone knows what you know



-
- Op-eds have an order: A leads to B leads to C. Not A leads to 4 leads to K.
- Each sentence supports the sentence before it.
- Each point is explained for readers who don't know what you are talking about.

SIX: AUTHENTICITY

Keep it real



- Write like you speak.
- Focus on lived experience.
- Avoid jargon.
- Leave the wonk at home.

SEVEN: STAY ACTIVE

Go on offense with your words



- Use active voice. Someone does something; not something was done to someone.
- Use This: Greedy corporate landlords are jacking up rents.
- Not This: Rents have been skyrocketing.

EIGHT: THE END

Tie the bow



That's all Folks!

- The ending is just as important as the beginning.
- Last chance to provide a strong summary of your point.
- **PRO TIP:** End with a phrase or idea that appeared in the opening.

BONUS: PITCHING AN OP-ED

Getting published



- Identify the outlet/s you want to publish your piece and find the appropriate editor.
- Email the editor with your name, title, organization AND why you and your experience make you the best person to tell this story.
- Include 2-3 sentences that sum up the piece and attach it to the email.
- Do not pitch it to multiple outlets at the same time. Pitch. Wait for response. Ping editor.
- Waiting depends on the news value of the piece. End of day for breaking news. 1-2 days for other pieces.

QUESTIONS?

For more information,
contact Housing Narrative Lab
Project Director, Marisol Bello at
mbello@housingnarrativelab.org

HOUSING
NARRATIVE
LAB • 

