

What is an Op-Ed?

An op-ed is a brief news piece that expresses the opinions of an author that is not an employee of the newspaper. Op-eds are commonly submitted by prominent figures in the public and private sectors such as politicians, CEO's, union leaders, and university academics. However, many local newspapers prefer to publish the opinions of local leaders like yourselves. This is your guide on how to write and publish an op-ed piece in your local paper.

How do I Submit an Op-Ed?

Every newspaper has its own system and guidelines for submitting op-ed pieces, but most follow the same general principles. Op-eds are usually between 500 and 800 words long, current, and exclusive to the newspaper you are submitting it to. Include a brief bio, along with your phone number, email address, and mailing address at the bottom, as the newspaper will call to confirm that you are the author. Be sure to check your local newspaper guidelines before submitting. Submission details and requirements will almost certainly be posted on their website.

Tips for Writing an Op-Ed:

- Focus on one issue or idea. You have a small amount of words to use, so choose them wisely.
- Express your opinion, then base it on factual, researched or first-hand information.
- Be timely, controversial, but not outrageous. Be the voice of reason.
- Be personal and conversational; it can help you make your point.
- Have a clear editorial viewpoint - come down hard on one side of the issue.
- Provide insight, understanding: educate your reader without being preachy.
- Be punchy when appropriate; showing you have a little fire in the belly can be an asset.
- Use clear, powerful, direct language that appeals to the average reader. Clarity is paramount.
- Near the end, clearly re-state your position and issue a call to action. Don't philosophize.
- Don't be disappointed if your op-ed doesn't get published. Newspapers get lots of op-eds daily. If you don't hear back within 10 days, submit the op-ed to another newspaper.
- Don't hesitate to submit your op-ed to blogs or other online publications.

Sample Op-Ed Piece:**Washington: When Trimming Budget Fat, Don't Cut the Bone**

Since President Obama's State of the Union address last month, there has been a great deal of public discussion about streamlining and reorganizing the federal government.

Predictably, many of these discussions have centered on reducing the cost of government through broad-based discretionary spending cuts, federal workforce reductions, agency consolidations, or some combination of the three. Opinions vary greatly on where to make cuts, and by how much, but most propose doing it in an oversimplified and ambiguous fashion.

As the President prepared his budget, I know it must have been tempting to sign on to some of these proposals; they certainly make a convenient target for anyone looking to make broad reductions. But there has been something conspicuously missing from the conversation about these wide-ranging cuts to the federal government: The reality of what these cuts mean for the American people.

Though it is important to set goals and establish benchmarks for reducing the deficit, it is even more imperative to acknowledge what it will take to get us back on a path to sustainability. These proposals may trim the deficit somewhat, but they will also cut vital government services that are essential to our nation's economy, our communities, and our national security.

As president of a union representing 110,000 civil servants, and a 30-year fed myself, I can tell you without question that arbitrary spending cuts and workforce reductions will greatly diminish the government services on which the American people rely.

At a time when thousands of wounded veterans are returning from warzones abroad, it makes no sense to slash the number of doctors and nurses at VA hospitals across the country. VA hospitals are significantly understaffed as it is. It would be foolish to reduce the Customs and Border Protection budget when drug and human trafficking are rampant along our Southern border. If anything, we need to increase our resources along our border. Cutting back on the Social Security Agency workforce at a time when millions of baby boomers are set to retire would be disastrous for our nation's seniors. When arbitrary and poorly conceived cuts are made, backlogs will form, and the Social Security checks they rely on won't get sent. These are the real implications of broad cuts to federal agencies.

I understand that the federal budget deficit is enormous, and like it or not, all options to increase revenues or reduce federal spending have to be on the table. There is no doubt that the budget deficit is on an unsustainable path. But if we are going to discuss spending reduction, we have to talk seriously about what services we are willing to sacrifice to get our fiscal house in order.

Are we going to put government on a diet, or are we going to start chopping off limbs?

When President Obama introduces his budget on Feb. 14th, I hope it will be the start of an adult conversation with the American people about what services we want, and what services we don't want. The debate will be long and hard-fought, but it must happen in an open and honest way. The American people, who will ultimately bear the consequences of these decisions, deserve nothing less.

Federal workers and the services they provide are a critical contribution to our nation's continued security and prosperity. If we start recklessly cutting the vital services our nation relies on, we could be left without a leg to stand on.