

10 TIPS

rethink

Writing & Placing Op-Eds

- 1 Always tie your op-ed to a news hook.** If you can see one coming, plan ahead. If a story is breaking, act fast (within 24 hours). There has to be a compelling reason why an editor should run it now. Make that point directly in your pitch.
- 2 Make it personal.** Tell a story. Invoke an experience. Make it readable and relevant. Audiences respond to accessible content and editors look for that.
- 3 Make it local.** With the exception of a small number of national outlets, there has to be a local tie-in. What is the relevance of the local Representative or the state's Senators? How will the decision make an impact on the community? What is the community history with the issue?
- 4 Choose the right author.** A relevant local signer is key with most regional and local newspapers. With national outlets, the prestige and credibility of the author can make all the difference. More than two signers rarely adds to a piece.
- 5 Choose the right messenger.** On any given topic, some messengers have more persuasive credibility with the target audience than others. Who does your target audience listen to? Who do they respect? And who do they ignore?
- 6 Argue a strong point—powerfully.** An op-ed argues a point of view, it does not weigh all sides of an issue. As a general rule, make one strong point and back it up with 3–4 supporting arguments.
- 7 Avoid jargon.** Use accessible language. Wherever possible use metaphors, analogies, and stories to connect to your audience and make your point more persuasive.
- 8 Always respect the word limit.** Editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. If it's too long, it will very likely be rejected immediately. Typically, 700 words will do, but always check the paper's op-ed page to find out their preference. Your odds will be better if your piece is even shorter.
- 9 Start strong, finish strong.** Open with a strong, tight, clear paragraph. If the reader only reads two paragraphs, they should get your essential point. The middle paragraphs exist to reinforce your point. The final paragraph should close the deal and leave the reader feeling like it's only sensible to agree with you.
- 10 Name names.** Policies don't just happen—people make decisions. In political communications, the aim is to declare who is responsible and why they should do the right thing. This does not need to be adversarial, but it cannot be vague or understated.

