Write and pitch powerful op-eds

With thanks to the Asian American Journalists Association
What is an op-ed?
An op-ed is...

• A knowledgeable argument
• A personal story about an issue that’s in the news
• An argument or story about something that is “off the radar,” but could be of high interest
An op-ed is not...

• Community news
• A progress report
• A news release
• An event preview or event summary
• Part of politician’s campaign to get elected
• A way to “get the word out” about your organization
You are already an expert

• You are uniquely authorized to write a guest column about an issue
• Example: Are you an immigrant? You have a unique opinion about immigration reform.
• Example: You’ve studied an issue extensively and can present a knowledgeable argument.
Writing an op-ed
A great op-ed makes me feel something
Op-ed structure

Short lead, ~100 words
Main argument
Research supporting your argument
Propose solutions
Ending, kicker or call to action
Writing an oped

• Think about what you would want to read if you were not a member of this group.
• How would you make this argument to a friend who knows nothing about the topic?
• Leave out jargon.
Writing an oped

• Who would be the audience(s) for this column?
• How would you convince them?
• Consider an unexpected stance. Surprise me.
• “Why I...”: Tell us about something that distinguishes you...
Writing an oped

• Source all statistics, quotes
• Page numbers, links original sources
• Attribute facts and statistics
• At the end, include a biographical line about you and your experience
• Skip footnotes. Link in the text.
An op-ed can be...

• Traditionally, op-eds are articles. But what else can it be?
• An FAQ
• A video?
• A photo gallery?

• What is the best way to tell this story?
Pitching an op-ed
Pitching: Stand out from the crowd

• Read the submission guidelines
• In an introductory email, explain why you are the best person to write this, in 200 words or fewer. Include your phone number.
• Writing on the news? Send your oped quickly.
• Be pleasantly persistent
Make an op-ed editor happy

• Don’t include anything you’re not sure about
• Help us factcheck: Include links to all statistics in the oped
• Don’t be surprised or mad if your oped is edited or shortened. Many editors will try to let you know.
Make an op-ed editor happy

• BUT don’t expect multiple rounds of editing and multiple last-minute changes
• Stick to the word count. At The News and the Free Press, it’s about 550-600 words.
• Be open to having your oped run with another on the other side of the issue
• Don’t submit to multiple newspapers at once
Make an oped editor happy

• Don’t demand to hear back the same day
• Don’t expect a commitment to publish on spec
• Accept web-only publication
• If the oped is timely, tell us why
• Letter vs. oped? There’s a difference.
What to know about newsrooms

• The op-ed or voices editor is usually doing the work of 2 or 3 other full-time people.
• Our news organizations are taking fewer guest columns than we used to.
• Timeliness, unexpected/contrarian views, conversational tone and readability matter.
What to know about newsrooms

• Many newsrooms don’t have copy editors, so seek an extra set of eyes on your own.
• Ask to see the final version.
• Headlines: Editors care about SEO, headlines that grab readers.
• We have different headlines for different platforms that have different goals/character counts.
More on headlines ...

**Carry on John Dingell's legacy by making health care more affordable**

Video: Former Vice President Joe Biden deli...

How we can carry on John Dingell's legacy

The nation isn't done making health care more affordable.

Carry on John Dingell's legacy by making health care more affordable

affordable-health-care
Spread the word

• Once published, share the link to your oped with all of your networks.
  • Family and friends
  • The community groups you work with
  • Members of your organization
  • Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and more
Social media counts

Email excerpt from op-ed writer Arsalan Iftikhar @TheMuslimGuy:

“Please let me know when the article goes live and I will send out to my 30,000+ Facebook/Twitter followers...

Thanks again for this wonderful opportunity...Hope to do it again soon :)

Yours,
Arsalan”
No does not mean never.
No means not right now.