

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

relieved proud
euphoric thrilled ecstatic
excited jubilant emotional
loved overjoyed scared joyful
d awed patriotic overwhelmed grateful an
trious exhausted delighted awesome psyched speechless

Screen shot of New York Times Election Day 2008 word cloud

Op-ed structure

Short lead, ~100 words

Main argument

Research supporting your argument

Propose solutions

Ending, kicker or call to action

The screenshot shows a web page with the following content:

- Title:** Guest: End the culture of silence about sexual assaults in the military
- Lead:** It's time to change the military's culture of silence about acts of violence against their own, writes guest columnist Gael Trisman.
- Author:** By Gael Trisman, Op-Ed Contributor
- Text:** The military is cultivating a silencing culture. Intentional efforts to prevent public scrutiny and guarantee victims anonymity to stay silent. This could be leading to another sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.
- Text:** Instead of helping in the U.S. military, our administration military, to include with dozens of examples where laws in place intended and therefore perpetuated sexual violence against the personnel.
- Text:** It is time to change the military's culture of silence about acts of violence against their own.
- Text:** I want Pentagon report showed a disturbing pattern of escalating sexual violence against women and men in the military. These violations follow a long, sad list of atrocities of the military's own acts of assault.
- Text:** There was the 2011 "Innocent" scandal, where 22 women and 7 men were sexually assaulted by fellow service members, that raised the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. In 2012, the Pentagon revealed a systematic pattern of sexual assaults of the U.S. Air Force Academy. In 2013, it was revealed that the military was covering up sexual violence and suppression of personnel in the United States.
- Text:** In 2012, twenty years of silence of sexual violence inside the military cannot be regarded as a sign of a will to move forward. The Air Force Incident report in charge of sexual violence investigation programs at the Pentagon recently was another for sexually assaulting a woman, suicide as well.
- Text:** This article challenges the legitimacy of military service of the military. Our military officials are accountable to civilian leaders through a chain of command. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and President Obama.
- Text:** In our nation's history, it will be held for the public and our elected leaders to sustain the outrage and the abuse of power. But we must. Our volunteer troops and the integrity of our military institutions depend on our ability to remain vigilant.
- Text:** Civilians must have power to hold the military accountable. The secretary of defense should work with Congress to establish a task force to examine all laws and military statutes that define the scope of "military service of the military" and then assert that service to the fullest extent.
- Text:** Victims of sexual violence, military or civilian, must never be denied their rights to a trial by a jury of their peers. The secretary of defense should assign a panel of civilian legal scholars specializing in military justice and Judge Catherine Cappelletti, who presides over the civilian services to explore how military courts are structured to address criminal cases involving sexual violence and violence.
- Text:** Our military needs, civilian leaders and officers should have a safe hotline to report sexual violence without violating their oath to obey the military chain of command. If our civilian officials subscribe to the secretary of defense should monitor the hotline, bypassing military authorities.
- Text:** U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., has stated the structural reforms. More will be needed and must be pursued to open up the military culture to scrutiny. These proposed actions and others could prevent a future and prevent a repeat of a similar (or exceptional) contribution to national security.

At the bottom of the page, there are advertisements for Glitzer's and a 1-800 number.

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 ...

The image shows a content management system (CMS) interface for editing a news article. The main headline is "Carry on John Dingell's legacy by making health care more affordable" with a character count of 22 left. Below the headline is a rich text editor with various formatting options like bold, italic, and link. A video player is embedded in the main content area, showing a video titled "Video: Former Vice President Joe Biden deli...". On the right side, there is a sidebar with several fields for editing content:

- Story** / **Pub Info** (4 attachments)
- Front Headline** (6 left): How we can carry on John Dingell's legacy
- Brief** (93 left): The nation isn't done making health care more affordable.
- Page Title** (2 left): Carry on John Dingell's legacy by making health care more affordable
- URL Ending** (78 left): 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.