

How to Write an Op-Ed



What is an “op-ed?”

- The origin of the term “op-ed” is derived from the piece originally having appeared on the “opposite side” of the newspaper from the editorial page.
- Now, the term refers to a piece of writing that represents a strong and focused “opinion” from the writer.

What makes an op-ed an op-ed?

- **The length:** It is typically short – no longer than 800 words.
- **The subject matter:** The piece seeks to make a clearly defined point.
- **The perspective:** It is written in a way that the writer attempts to paint a picture of his or her point of view.
- **The character:** The writer’s unique voice is evident in the piece.

Questions to consider before writing your op-ed:

- What point am I trying to make?
- Who will care about what I am writing? (It will help to know the audience that you are trying to convince with your op-ed.)
- What kind of voice will you write in? Will you be conversational? Contemplative? Experienced? Informative? Self-effacing? You can adopt more than one voice in your piece, but you should avoid taking on too many – stay focused.

Beginning . . . middle . . . and end!!

Beginning:

- Think of your beginning or opening line as your “hook” – it needs to be strong and to grab the reader’s attention to entice them to dig in to the rest of your piece.
- Your beginning also serves as the foundation for the rest of your piece.

Middle:

- The body of your piece must be grounded in research. Although it’s an opinion piece, back your opinion with supporting facts.

End:

- Consider whether your ending will be “open-ended” (suggests a conclusion rather than states it outright) or “close-ended” (which states a conclusion rather than suggests one).
- Your ending should complement your beginning and should “button it up” nicely so that your piece is a neat and complete package.
- The end of your piece is typically the most memorable detail.
- Include a “final epiphany” or bold statement in your ending, or even something that calls the reader to action.

Final revision checklist:

Once you’ve written your piece, check:

- Clarity and simplicity (less is more!)
- Voice and tone
- Direct quotations and copy edits for accuracy
- That you’ve properly credited all sources through formal citations
- Consistency – do you contradict yourself anywhere?

Source: Harvard Kennedy School

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