Writing Op-Eds

Writing a well-timed, sharply focused opinion piece for the editorial pages of a newspaper or on online blog is one of the best ways to market yourself – no journalist is interpreting what you say for a mass audience. It's just you and your words. You need to make those words count. Here's how:

1. Timing is Everything

You will have a much better chance of getting published if you piggyback on a major event, news story, conference or issue causing considerable debate. If the newspapers are covering an issue on their news pages, you can bet they want to hear opinions about it. Try to stay ahead of the curve. Know when events are happening in your area of expertise – that could involve court dates, speeches or reports about to be released. Then get in early. If there's no news hook to your opinion piece, a well-written commentary about a catchy subject is universal.

2. Be Focused, Have a Sharp Point of View

Get to the point right away – and make it as pointed as you can. This is not the time to leave the best for last. Then you can spend some time backing up your opinion and explaining it while knocking down opposing views or praising similar ones.

3. Do Your Research

It's all about ``informed opinion." Make sure to thoroughly investigate the issue. Understand the other sides. Be credible.

4. Keep it Short

Write a maximum of 800 words. Better yet – 650 words. It's less work for the editor and that might make all the difference.

5. Bring News to the Table

Give people a new twist on an old issue - a new set of facts, new statistics, a new way of looking at things. Devise a solution to a problem that hasn't been suggested yet. Or come up with a quirky, different subject that is so well written there's no choice but to publish it.

6. Use Simple Language

Now is not the time to prove how smart you are by using big words that no one understands. Use short, direct sentences whenever possible. Don't assume the reader has any special knowledge of the subject. Keep acronyms and detailed statistics at a minimum.

7. Use Colourful Language

Use anecdotes and tell stories. Give readers a reason to care. Explain your own connection to the issue and how you are qualified to comment. Use real examples and clear illustrations. Don't generalize.

8. Know your Publication

Read the publication before you submit a commentary and get to know its politics. Most lean one way or the other and so do their readers. While many will welcome views that are strongly opposed to the general editorial view, some won't, so don't be surprised.

9. Submitting an Op-ed

Make sure to specify Op-ed Submission in the subject line of your email. Include your full name, contact information and credentials. Submissions should be exclusive to one media outlet; don't approach another publication until the first one has declined.

10. Don't Give Up

If one publication rejects your piece, try another and another and another. There are a lot of reasons why opinion pieces are rejected that have nothing to do with quality. Perhaps the newspaper just printed a commentary on that topic. Keep trying.

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Also try: *iPolitics* (online political site), *Ottawa Business Journal*