

# Op-Eds: What are they? What do they look like?

## What is their purpose?

An “op-ed,” is a piece of public speech signed by its author, who is typically a contributor to a newspaper. It refers to the page in the newspaper “opposite the editorial page,” which consists of unsigned opinions by newspaper staff. Effective examples of these forms of public speech respond to an event or issue and connect it to broader social, political, and economic problems (usually the ones that have been studied in the given course). An op-ed should offer a clearly outlined and organized argument that reflects a thorough and thoughtful engagement with the issue at hand. For this type of course assignment, the writer must be, or become, well-informed on the issue through a thorough engagement with media coverage. Extensive citations and expansive research are not necessary, but it is necessary to cite the media sources used to develop the op-ed’s argument. The point of this style of writing is to communicate an opinion about a current event to a broad audience. Successful “op-ed” writing is brief, succinct, and direct. Since an op-ed is usually between 500-1000 words, there is not a lot of space to build an argument that must be convincing. Clearly explained examples—both of the issue under discussion and the structures it is connected to—are key!

### A successful op-ed will complete four main tasks:

- 1) Write an **introduction** (or ‘**lede**’ in newspaper-speak) of 3-5 sentences that briefly and precisely introduces the issue at hand and the **specific argument** you will make in response to this issue. The **lede** should entice the reader into reading the full op-ed and tell them why they should pay attention to the op-ed’s topic.
- 2) The **body** of an op-ed should be 3 – 6 paragraphs long and present the **evidence** for the op-ed’s argument. The paragraphs here should be longer than the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, but shorter than the typical paragraphs in a formal academic essay. This is the part of the op-ed where the author discusses specific examples and present evidence from experts to support the argument. While the op-ed aims to persuade, there is no room for filler, vague statements, or blanket moralizing (even if these may be commonly used in some of the op-eds published in national newspapers) – use the maxim “show, don’t tell.”
- 3) The **organization of the argument is crucial**. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that describes the claim the argument will make.
- 4) A concise **conclusion** and a **walk-off**. The conclusion summarizes what has been examined and why the reader should care about it. A conclusion should be about 2-5 sentences long. In some cases, authors will set off one sentence into its own paragraph for emphasis. The **walk-off** is the ‘what is to be done?’ part of an op-ed. Every op-ed should look ahead and offer a possible approach for next steps to address the issue at hand. A walk-off should be 1-2 paragraphs and 3-5 sentences long.

### Additional resources about approaches to writing Op-Ed pieces:

- Advocates for Youth, [“Writing an Op-Ed”](#)
- Political Entrepreneurs, [“Engaging Students Through Op-Ed Writing Assignments”](#)
- The OpEd Project, [“Op-Ed Writing: Tips and Tricks”](#)

