



Op-ed Writing Essentials



Why Prioritize Op-Eds?

Op-eds are a powerful tool for building your media competence, that allow us to engage specific policymakers and audiences and amplify the voices of those with limited political influence, which is particularly important in U.S. drug policy debates.

Key Elements of Effective Op-Eds

1. Strong Lead & News Hook

The first one to two sentences, the lead, is the most important part of your op-ed.

- **Lead:** Be bold and use clear, concise sentences.
- **News hook:** Have a timely, widely resonating news hook that has been covered in the news before; usually, this is part of your lead.
- **Lead prompts:** Consider citing to a major new study, use a dramatic anecdote, personal story, or anniversary, challenge conventional wisdom, or reference popular culture.

2. Relevant Experience/Expertise

Explain why you are writing on the topic.

- **Authority:** Establish your credibility with evidence of your expertise or experience.

Example: “As an [addiction specialist physician](#), I served on the frontline of this overdose crisis during the pandemic.”

3. Length Matters

- **Conciseness:** Aim for 800-1,200 words.
- Check The Op-ed Project’s [submission requirements](#).
- **Paragraph Structure:** Stick to 1 main idea per paragraph, with 2-3 sentences, and 4-5 lines total. (The perfect paragraph = 1,2,3,4,5)

4. Basic Structure

- **Introduction (with thesis):** Start with a strong lead and clearly state your argument.
- **Arguments:** Make three evidence-based points using **facts, stats, and quotes**.
- **“Of course” paragraph:** Acknowledge and refute obvious counterarguments.
- **Conclusion:** Often answers the lead, is a final epiphany, or a call to action.

5. Accuracy

- **Hyperlinks:** Use links for **stats, facts, and quotes**. They back up your points and aid in fact-checking. Link to 2 or 3 words, on the operative verb or noun.
- **Credible sources:** Ensure links are from reputable sources and are accessible.

6. Don't Vent

- **Tone:** Use a conversational voice and appeal to emotions without being shrill.

7. Cultivate A Regular Practice

- **Resources:** Utilize platforms like [The Op-ed Project](#) and [The Progressive Media Project](#) for tips and quick writing practices. State chapters should also consider organizing trainings for members by these groups for a small fee.

Contact Information

For further assistance or resources, reach out to Molly McGrath at mmcgrath@asam.org.