



# How to Get Your Op-ed Placed in a Professional Publication

Never underestimate the value of a strong op-ed. A well placed article can go a long way toward getting people talking about free speech issues and educating the public about the state of free speech on your campus, or even nationally. The *Huffington Post* op-ed, “[How College Students Can Promote Campus Policy Change and Free Speech in 2016](#),” written by FIRE’s Azhar Majeed, did just that! Below, you will find some tips to get your article placed.

## WRITING

Before you propose an op-ed, it’s important that you have a clear topic and that you have a draft written. If you pitch an idea to an editor without something written first, the editor will likely say “Let me see a first draft.”

Most newspapers have a strict word limit for op-eds, typically around 600 words. Even if they allow longer pieces, it is always important to express your point with clarity and concision. Make sure you always edit your draft down to the required length before sending it to an editor. Remember: Your story can be told in 600 words, so make sure you keep working on it until you’ve whittled it down to that length.

### Before writing:

- Make sure you pitch your piece to an outlet that runs op-eds and, if it does, that it runs op-eds on the topic on which you are seeking to write.
- Make sure the tone, arguments, and most importantly, intended audience for your op-ed match the outlet in which you are seeking to publish.
- A successful op-ed will include the following elements:

*Timing.* There is a window of opportunity when trying to publish an op-ed that discusses a big news event. Try your best to submit your op-ed within 36 hours of the news event.

*Significance.* Is your topic important? Do people understand why it should be of interest to them?

*Proximity.* People are always more interested in things happening nearby, especially if it might affect them personally.

*Prominence.* Does your topic involve important local issues or figures?

*Human Interest.* Try to tell a story that emphasizes the human element of your topic so that your reader can connect to your arguments emotionally.

Your column should be original. Most outlets require an op-ed to be exclusive to their paper. A good rule of thumb is that an exclusive op-ed cannot recycle more than 30 percent of the rhetoric from a previous op-ed.



## THE PITCH

**Keep email pitches short. Be sure to include:**

- One sentence introducing yourself, your credentials, and your relevant affiliations.
- Two sentences describing the topic of the op-ed, its thesis, and what makes this thesis unique.
- One sentence thanking the editor for their consideration and mentioning that you are available to work on any edits that might be suggested.
- Provide a phone number where you can be reached.
- Copy the op-ed into the body of the email, beneath the signature line. Do not attach an op-ed to an email unless otherwise directed.

## SENDING YOUR PITCH

Make sure that you follow any protocols that editors have set up. For example, if an outlet wants you to submit using a form or a general email address and you do not already have an established relationship with an editor there, use the form or general email address.

Be sure that you make your pitch to the correct editor. For high-circulation newspapers, there is usually a specific opinion page editor. For lower-circulation newspapers, the editorial page editor often also edits op-eds. With online outlets it can be hard to judge where to submit opinion pieces. In those cases, thoroughly read through the website or use your best judgement. It is also OK to call the outlet to ask how to submit op-eds.

## TIMING

If an editor decides to publish your op-ed, they won't want other outlets publishing the same piece. This means that you must pitch your content to only one media outlet at a time. Once you pitch an outlet, give the editor at least 48 hours to review the piece. If you don't hear back after 48 hours, send a follow up email. If after another 24 hours you don't receive a response to your follow-up email, pull the op-ed and submit it to another publication. Whenever you pull an op-ed, you must write the editor to inform them. In an email, thank the editor for their consideration and say you are trying to find another home for the piece.

## TIPS FOR OP-EDS ON BREAKING NEWS

- You have more flexibility in pitching breaking news. In these cases, it's OK to pull an op-ed from an outlet if you have not heard back from them in a timely fashion. Just make sure you tell the editor in your pitch that you are writing about breaking news and would appreciate a quick response. When you pull the piece, explain why you are pulling it so soon.
- You can call an opinion editor to tell them that you are writing an op-ed on breaking news and will have it to them soon for consideration. This is a nice courtesy and sometimes an editor will reserve a space on their page for you in the next day's paper.

Once an op-ed has been accepted, thank the editor and work with them on any edits. Always ask the editor when you can expect the op-ed to be published.

Feel free to contact us if you would like us to take a look at your op-ed or if you have any questions. Send the FIRE Student Network staff an email at [students@thefire.org](mailto:students@thefire.org).