

Writing and Submitting Op-Eds

Opinion editorials should be timely, specific, tailored for the target news outlet, and authoritative. Below are some tips and guidelines for writing op-eds and submitting them to news outlets. Please remember that ACS does NOT support legislation, nominees, or candidates.

Substance of an op-ed

1. **Begin with an attention-grabbing lede that is specific and timely.**
 - a. Clearly articulate a specific topic. Mention a specific action or initiative that affects the news outlet's audience. You can note the connection to broader trends later.
 - b. Communicate why the topic is relevant right now. Your anchor can be a recent court decision, an upcoming anniversary, an impending deadline, the conclusion of an investigation, a new study, etc.
2. **Demonstrate why the audience should care about your opinion.**
 - a. Your claim to authority can come from personal experience or professional expertise, but note your connection to the topic you are writing about in some way.
3. **Address, and refute, opposing viewpoints.**
 - a. Provide an accurate account of any contending positions on the topic, including who holds these positions and what their views are.
 - b. Respond to the other side's position, and explain why yours is the correct view.
 - c. If you are challenging the media narrative surrounding a certain topic, do not attack the media generally. That will not endear you to editorial staff.
4. **Cite specific facts.**
 - a. Cite reports, briefs, official government documents, etc.
 - b. Attribute your facts to the appropriate source; use the full names and/or titles of people, organizations, and governmental entities.
 - c. Make sure your facts are unimpeachable. Make phone calls to fact check, if necessary.
5. **Offer a solution.**
6. **Refer back to the lede in your conclusion.**

Submitting your op-ed

- **In your email, explain:** the topic of the op-ed, who you are, what you argue, what you know about the subject, why you're writing about it now, and how it will be different from other commentary. Also let the editor know *if you've sent your op-ed to any other news outlets*.
- **Submit in a timely manner.**
- **Submit a finished product.**
 - Conform with length restrictions. Do not offer to cut it down later.
 - Don't include footnotes or in-text citations, but have your sources ready for fact checking. If submitting to an online publication, include hyperlinks.
 - Edit carefully, and use AP style—not Bluebook.
- **Paste your op-ed directly into the email.**

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are much shorter than op-eds and should respond to a news story or op-ed that recently appeared in the target news outlet. Below are pointers for writing and submitting LTEs.

Substance of an LTE

- Begin with a simple salutation.
- Grab the reader's attention with your opening sentence. This is especially important for LTEs because they are so short.
- If your LTE directly responds to a previously published article or op-ed, note this in your letter. Quote the headline and date of publication at the beginning.
- Make your most important points early on. Editors frequently cut from the bottom up. Be sure to indicate why the issue is important and what should be done, or done differently.
- Include your full name and title in the signature, as well as your address, phone number, and email address.

Submitting your LTE

- **Keep it current.** If possible, submit your LTE on the same day that the article it responds to was published.
- **Keep it short.**
- **Don't limit yourself.** Write multiple LTEs and send to different news outlets. Be sure to adjust your letter based on the outlet's audience, geographical location, etc.
- **No ad hominem attacks.** Avoid name calling or any claims that could be viewed as libelous.
- **Be positive.** Not all LTEs must be critical. If an outlet positively covers your issue, write a letter praising their coverage and reinforcing their ideas.
- **Paste your LTE directly into the email.**

Local Radio and Television

Being interviewed on local radio and television stations can take your voice to every home and car in your area, and many people focus more on their local news than national news. Also, local stations are often more willing than national outlets to interview a wider variety of guests.

Pitching to local media

- When attempting to get on-air coverage of your views and perspective, it is best to first and foremost **lead with your credentials and area of expertise**. As a lawyer or law student, be sure that your point of contact at the station is aware of your influence in your field. Local stations are oftentimes more than willing to air the perspective of individuals within their markets.
- **Contact information for individuals** at stations can be found on the station's website. First, research what stations are in your area and which ones cover legal topics; or which are more diverse and may be willing to host such a conversation.
- Once you have found a television or radio station and point of contact, **make explicit your desire to be a featured guest** and, as stated above, lead with your credentials and make sure they know why your voice matters.
- **Be concise** in what you wish to express.

Preparing for interview

- Once you have secured a slot on your local television or radio station, you will likely be on for a minute or two. Do not anticipate being on long enough to explain all your thoughts or ideas on that specific issue. **Be prepared with one or two talking points** that you want to get across.
- **Do not underestimate your level of expertise**. Oftentimes it is a specific perspective that is desired.

Post-Interview

- After your interview, be sure to **ask your point of contact for the clip** – either audio or video – to be sent to you. Having your clips in your possession will make it easier to book an appearance in the future. And share your clip with ACS.