

Placing Your Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Writing a compelling op-ed or letter to the editor is only half the battle. In addition, you have to work to ensure your opinion piece is actually published so it can be read and shared by the readers who matter. That work takes place even before the drafting process begins.

Before You Begin Writing

- **Find your targets:** Consider which outlets might be ideal to target. Which outlets' readers are primed to care about the issue you plan to present? Keep in mind that outlets reaching a particular community or geographic area can be great targets, but so too can outlets that reach readers with particular interests be great options.
- **Prioritize your targets:** There may be upwards of a half-dozen outlets that *could* publish your opinion piece. Because you shouldn't submit the same content to multiple outlets at once (given that outlets want to ensure that what they're receiving won't also be published by one of their competitors), determine which would be your most ideal placement, second most ideal placement, and so on.
- **Determine the rules:** With a sense of the outlets you might target, determine each one's submission guidelines. When it comes to parameters like word counts, you may find that you need to adapt along the way. For example, you may find that your top target allows letters to the editors that are 250-300 words in length, but if they decline to publish your letter, you may decide to submit it to your second-choice outlet, only to find that they allow submissions of 200 words or less. Adapt accordingly.
- **Work your connections:** Identify who will be considering your submission and deciding if it is worthy of being published. Then, determine if you have any connections in common. If so, it may help you tailor your message more effectively. For example, if you discern that your local paper's opinion editor is connected on LinkedIn to a friend of yours, you could send her a message letting her know that you're preparing an op-ed for submission and wondering if she has any advice for how to make it as effective as possible.

Once You're Ready to Pitch

- **Follow the rules:** Take seriously the news outlets' parameters regarding word counts, how to submit your opinion piece, and so forth. Be diligent in following these guidelines, as choosing not to follow them can significantly diminish the odds that your letter to the editor or op-ed will be published.
- **Perfect your pitch:** If you are submitting your opinion piece via email, or if you're uploading it to an online form that includes a field for additional information, take the opportunity to write a short pitch note. In your note, offer a very brief summary of the argument you make and why you're confident it will be relevant to the outlet's readers.

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- **Remove any extra work for the recipient:** Like all of us, editors are busy. Editors also receive an intense volume of pitches on any given day, meaning they can all blend together. Facilitating the work associated with assessing your submission can enhance your chances of placement. For example, write a subject line that gets straight to the “so what” of your argument. Likewise, paste your submission in the body of your pitch email, rather than only attaching it, to help the recipient save a small amount of their highly valuable time.
- **Follow up assertively:** Following your submission, give the recipient one to two business days before following up (you can follow up sooner than later if your submission is on an urgent matter). When you follow up, it is often best to do so via means other than the original submission mechanism. For instance, if you submitted your opinion piece by email, follow it up with a phone call. Be kind but assertive: “Hi, I’m LaDonna from Pleasant Meadows Services and I’m calling because I wanted to make sure you saw my letter to the editor and see if you can tell me when it will be published.”
- **Lather, rinse, repeat:** If, after following up, you still don’t receive a response within two or three more business days (or you receive a response indicating they are not interested in publishing your opinion piece), it’s time to move on. You should now submit your opinion piece to the second- or third-choice outlet you identified when you prioritized your targets. Follow the same process you followed with the previous outlet.
- **Never should all hope be lost:** You might work through all your target outlets and still not be successful in getting your op-ed or letter to the editor placed. Don’t fret. Instead, consider how else you might make the most of the work you’ve put in. Can you publish it as a blog post on your LinkedIn page or company website? Can you break it down into a tweet thread for Twitter/X? Beyond that, consider what you can learn from the experience to be more effective next time. For example, was the lack of success due to the fact that outlets have been inundated with submissions lately, or might you have done a better job of framing why readers should care? Take note of those insights and revisit them before your next at-bat.