

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Tips for Personalizing and Submitting an Op-ed

Op-ed stands for opinion editorial, and it is typically a guest commentary written with a specific perspective on a timely topic. Op-eds can be written by prominent individuals such as community leaders, issue experts, policymakers or advocates, but they can also be written by individuals with a strong connection to and unique credibility on a specific issue, such as pediatricians with child health topics. Op-eds are increasingly viewed by legislators and community leaders as a vehicle to monitor public opinion on relevant federal legislative issues such as health reform, and they serve as a valuable platform to communicate a specific perspective on a relevant topic to a mass audience.

Op-eds should be timely, but they do not need to be in response to a specific story. There is no guarantee that op-eds will be published once they are submitted, and they are exclusive. This means that you cannot pitch your op-ed to more than one paper at a time—the first outlet you pitch to must pass on publication before you submit the piece to multiple outlets.

When submitting your op-ed, be sure to follow the guidelines outlined by the specific publication you are submitting to—every publication has different word length requirements and submission preferences. You can typically find op-ed submission guidelines in the paper’s “opinion/editorial” section or on the related Web page. Make sure to include your name, title, address, phone number and e-mail contact information along with your submission.

The following guidelines will help you submit and publish your op-ed:

- **Keep it brief.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors may not have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 600 to 800 words will do, though be sure to check with your paper for specific word length preferences.
- **Make a single point.** You have limited space, so make one point clearly and persuasively. Be sure to make a specific recommendation for action depending on who your audience is (a member of Congress voting a certain way on a bill, etc). Be sure to include a compelling title.
- **Avoid jargon.** Simple language ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. Avoid acronyms or technical language.
- **Use examples.** Anecdotes and personal stories are persuasive tools. As pediatricians, your patients and personal experiences are your most powerful points of reference.
- **Engage the reader from start to finish.** Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a compelling vignette or a well-stated argument, and your final paragraph should clearly summarize your perspective and call out any request for action.
- **Follow up.** Most editors will respond to you within a week. If you haven’t heard back in that time frame or if your piece is particularly time sensitive, make a follow-up phone call to the publication’s editorial page editor to check in.