

Writing and Placing your Op-Ed

As a professor at Stetson Law, you are already an established legal expert. Have you considered writing an opinion editorial article for a newspaper or magazine? Your op-ed can open up new discussion, move public policy and help Stetson Law gain national recognition. It will also lead to future contacts with the editorial editors. By investing the time to write a carefully crafted 750-word piece, you may enjoy recognition in the nation's top newspapers.

Here are a few *guidelines* to consider:

Have an opinion: Craft an article that states your opinion in the first two sentences. Write about public discussions that you find interesting. Write about something that is worthy of legislative or policy change. Write about an injustice that is occurring. Write about what might happen if important changes do not occur. There are no shortages of issues that need to be addressed and an opinion editorial page is frequently one of the most popular pages in a newspaper or magazine. Tell the reader why they should care, and offer your suggestion or solution. Don't forget to address your opposing side to add credibility to your argument.

Timing: Ask yourself: is this an issue people are talking about? Is there a tie-in to events happening in the news? Why should the reader or the editor care?

Brevity: Follow the editorial guidelines for the publication you are targeting. Most newspapers have a limit of 750 words for an opinion editorial. Avoid jargon. Editors will appreciate pieces that use short, simple sentences and concise paragraphs.

Focus: Successful op-eds are powerful, punchy and persuasive. They are not purely informational—they explicitly support or oppose an idea.

Style: You have about 10 seconds to hook your reader, and your first reader is a busy editor who will determine whether or not your article will make it into the paper. Make your article unique: make it personal, and include something *provocative, humorous* or *unexpected*.

In the body of the piece, support your opinion. Use a mixture of facts and metaphors to relate complex ideas. Paint a picture of colorful details, not dry statistics.

Conclude with a paragraph that summarizes your opinion: Casual readers may skim a headline, and then read only the final paragraph and byline. Write a **strong summary** that links back to a phrase or thought that you used in your lead.

Submit: Finally, talk with the Office of Communications to find the best placement for your piece. It doesn't hurt to call us before you write your piece. We are likely able to provide some additional tips that will help place your article. Include your correct title and day and evening contact information for the editors. Remember that editors at national newspapers receive a mind-numbing quantity of submissions, and most are rejected. Keep in mind that your regional and local newspapers will almost always give preference to local writers. Some newspapers demand exclusive submissions, so be prepared to wait a few days for a response. Let the Office of Communications send and track responses to your submission. Contact us at 727-562-7381 or email communications@law.stetson.edu.