

# Commentary (Op-Ed) Guidelines

The [media relations team](#) is available to help you craft and place commentary articles in the op-ed pages of local and national newspapers. Here are answers to frequently asked questions about writing op-ed, or commentary, articles:

## **Q. What is an op-ed piece?**

A. An op-ed piece is essentially an argument by an expert on a newsworthy issue. It expresses an opinion, and is not a detached analysis. It should present readers with a compelling new perspective, written in an interesting, engaging way.

## **Q. How long should an op-ed piece be?**

A. About 650-725 words -- not much longer.

## **Q. How many topics should it address?**

A. Ideally, just one. Op-ed pieces are typically narrow in their focus.

## **Q. What are the chances of getting an op-ed piece published in the Los Angeles Times?**

A. The Times uses less than 5 percent of the submissions it receives.

## **Q. What criteria determine whether a submission is published?**

A. Content, writing style and timing?

## **Q. What should I know about content?**

A. Have something new and important to say about a major issue. The opinion should not be one that is widely known or that has been expressed already in the media. The opinion may be contrary to a widely held public opinion, or one that simply has not received much attention in the media, but deserves attention.

## **Q. How should the piece be written?**

A. In a clear, understandable way that does not assume specialized knowledge by the reader. The piece is designed for a large, general audience -- readers who are intelligent, but may not know much about this particular subject. The writing should not be too academic or filled with technical terms, but should be very readable.

**Q. How should the piece be structured?**

A. There are a number of ways to structure an op-ed piece. One common way that is often effective is to begin by stating your argument succinctly and if possible, in an interesting or clever way in the first paragraph, and then spend the following paragraphs supporting your argument. Then anticipate and refute the primary objections that can be raised to your argument, and conclude in a brief final paragraph that summarizes your argument and the most persuasive reasons for it.

**Q. How is timing important?**

A. An op-ed piece is more likely to be published if it addresses an issue that is currently in the news-especially if it offers a new perspective.

**Q. Why are more than 95 percent of op-ed pieces to the Times rejected?**

A. Partly because of space considerations, but often because of weaknesses in the pieces themselves. Many do not express an opinion, address too many issues, make obvious points, are self-serving, poorly written, too long, or too removed from issues in the news. If your submission is well written, timely and presents a new perspective on a newsworthy issue, your chances of getting it published increase substantially.

**Q. How long does it take for the Times to publish an op-ed piece?**

A. It varies quite a bit. If the piece is very timely, it can be published in a matter of days. If it is not so timely, the Times may hold the piece for weeks, sometimes longer, before publishing it. However, if the Times will not use the piece, they usually decide quickly.

**Q. Can I submit an op-ed piece to more than one newspaper at a time?**

A. The Los Angeles Times wants to publish original pieces before any other newspaper. The Times, by the way, is part of a wire service whose stories and op-ed pieces may be distributed to some 600 newspapers worldwide.

**Q. Do the guidelines discussed here apply to op-ed pieces at other newspapers besides the Los Angeles Times, such as the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal?**

A. Generally, yes, with a couple of exceptions. Op-ed pieces in the USA Today are shorter, and pieces in opinion sections of some Sunday newspapers can be somewhat longer and more complex.

**- *Stuart Wolpert/UCLA Media Relations***