

# Science Communication

## Writing an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

### Why Your Perspective Matters

Both op-eds and letters to the editor (LTEs) are powerful tools for science communication. By writing one, you can help bring scientific expertise into public discourse, ensuring that evidence-based perspectives reach policymakers, journalists and the wider community.

Scientists play a crucial role in shaping public understanding and influencing policy. By sharing your voice, you can help bridge the gap between science and society, ensuring informed discussions on the issues that matter.

### What is an Op-Ed?

An **op-ed** (short for “opposite the editorial page”) is a **persuasive opinion article** written to draw attention to an issue, often in response to a current event or policy. Op-eds allow you to:

- **Raise awareness** about a scientific or policy-related issue.
- **Advocate for change** by influencing public opinion and decision-makers.
- **Share expertise** with the public, connecting science and policy.

**Length:** 600-750 words

#### Structure:

- **Lead** – Establish relevance and urgency
- **Body** – Support with facts, data and real-world examples
- **Conclusion** – Reinforce your key message with a clear call to action

### What is an LTE?

An LTE is a short, direct response to an article, editorial or issue covered by a publication. LTEs are ideal for:

- **Correcting** misinformation or clarifying facts.
- **Supporting or opposing** a stance in a publication.
- Highlighting an **underrepresented perspective**.

**Length:** 150-250 words

#### Structure:

- **Lead** – State why you are writing and reference the original article
- **Body** – Provide key facts or personal insights
- **Conclusion** – Summarize key points with a final takeaway







## General Writing Tips

- **Be Clear and Concise** – Stick to the word limit and remove unnecessary words.
- **Be Timely** – Connect your piece to current events or recent news coverage.
- **Use a Strong Hook** – Grab the reader's attention in the first sentence.
- **Be Persuasive** – Present strong arguments, supported by facts and personal expertise.
- **Avoid Jargon** – Write for a general audience; use clear, accessible language.
- **Acknowledge Opposing Viewpoints** – Address counterarguments to strengthen your credibility.
- **End With Impact** – Conclude with a clear call to action or key takeaway.
- **Work With a Public Information Officer (PIO)** – Universities and institutions often have media teams that can help refine your submission.

## Tips for Writing an Op-Ed

- **State Your Position Clearly** – Make your argument upfront and explain why it matters.
- **Use Personal or Local Examples** – Relate the issue to real people or experiences.
- **Submit to One Outlet at a Time** – Most publications **do not** allow simultaneous submissions.

## Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

- **Respond Quickly** – Submit within 48 hours of the article's publication.
- **Get to the Point** – Editors often trim LTEs, so state your argument in the first sentence.
- **Sign Your Name and Affiliation** – This adds credibility to your letter.

## Master the Ancient Art of Persuasion

*Persuasion isn't just about facts—combining logic, emotion and credibility will make your message stick.*

- **Logos (Logic & Reasoning)** – Build a strong case with facts, data and clear reasoning that appeal to the reader's logic.
- **Pathos (Emotion & Connection)** – Use personal stories or real-world examples to create a sense of urgency and make your argument relatable.
- **Ethos (Credibility & Trust)** – Establish your authority on the subject by highlighting your expertise, affiliations or firsthand experience.





Finding the Right Publication and Submitting Your Article

Not every publication is the right fit for your article. Before submitting, consider:

- **Local vs. National** – If your topic is community-based, target local newspapers. If it has wider implications, aim for national outlets.
- **Audience & Reach** – Who reads this publication? Ensure your piece aligns with their interests.
- **Recent Coverage** – Review past opinion pieces for accepted topics and styles.

**Follow submission guidelines carefully.** Most publications list guidelines under the **Opinion** or **Letters** section. If not, check **Contact Us** for editor details. Key considerations:

- **Exclusivity Rules** – Many outlets **do not** allow simultaneous submissions.
- **Submission Format** – Some require email with a specific subject line, others use online forms.



Activity 1: Headline & Hook Challenge

Step 1: Choose a Topic

Select a scientific or policy-related issue you care about. It can be related to climate change, health policy, education or another topic relevant to your field.

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Step 2: Craft a Headline

Write three different headline options for your Op-Ed or LTE. Write three different headlines using these approaches:

- Direct Statement (e.g., “Why Wildfire Prevention Needs More Federal Funding”)
- Provocative Question (e.g., “Is Your Drinking Water Really Safe?”)
- Play on Words (e.g., “A Sinking Feeling: How Coastal Cities Must Prepare for Rising Seas”)

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Step 3: Write a Hook

A strong opening sentence makes the reader want to keep reading. Write three different hooks using different techniques:

- Compelling Statistic (e.g., “In the last decade, extreme heat events have tripled in the U.S.”)
- Personal Anecdote (e.g., “Last summer, my town was flooded for the third time in five years. I knew then that climate change wasn’t just a distant threat—it was here.”)
- Bold Statement or Question (e.g., “We are failing our children with outdated science education—this must change.”)

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Step 4: Reflect

Which headline and hook combination is the strongest? Why?

Share with a partner or review yourself. Which version is the most compelling?



### Lead

Why are you writing this?



### Body

Provide supporting details



### Conclusion

Call to Action

## Outline Your Own Op-Ed:

- 1. Lead: (Why are you writing this?)** What event, article or issue prompted you to write? How does this topic impact your community or field?

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- 2. Body: (Provide supporting details)** What are two to three key points you want to make? How does your expertise or experience add credibility? Include data, research or local examples to support your case.

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- 3. Conclusion: (Call to action)** What do you want readers to think, feel or do after reading? Suggest next steps, whether it's supporting a policy, attending an event or contacting lawmakers.

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