

Public Engagement Project

at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

Bringing Research to the Public



Writing Opinion Editorials March 24, 2015

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Four Questions about Writing Op-eds



- 1. Why Do it?
- 2. How Long Does it Take?
- 3. How to Relay Research (Yours and Others')?
- 4. How Does the Process Work?

1. Why Write Opinion Editorials?



- Investment in public education/dialogue
- Expand reach of research dissemination
- Opportunity for different form of prose
- Demonstrate relevance/impact research

2. How Long Does it Take?



- Less time than you might think if you have:
 - Original/new take on conventional problem/issue
 - ✦ Can be with your own research or others' research
 - Familiarity/facility with the Op-ed format
 - ✦ Practice the format in advance so that you can make
 - Creative use of current issues to hook your article on

3. What is the Format?



- 600-1200 words
- Short, active tense sentences
- Paragraphs 1 to 5 sentences
- Motivate the article in terms of real-life, real-world relevance
- The main point is made in first paragraph (or 3-5th sentence)
- In addition to analysis, there has to be a normative take away
- Use a few compelling statistics but only the key ones
- Make research come alive with stories, anecdotes, personal voice
- You may need to complement your research strength with others'
- Conclude with strong synthesis statement, and humor or heft.

How is It Different From other Academic Writing?



- Don't frame in terms of existing theoretical debates
- No methodological details, even if these really interests you
- Be accurate and current but need not be *super-precise*
- Draw on established knowledge/others' research
- Analysis can be exploratory: can use “may be”, “seems”
- Avoid common meta-narratives from one's own discipline
- May be more personal, passionate, hopeful, creative
- There is more than one way to skin a cat!

4. How Does the Process Work?



For Tips on How to Pitch and Details on Submission, visit:

- <http://www.theopedproject.org>