

How to Write an Op-Ed

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Rule # 1: Need to Write Well

Clear writing requires clear thinking Do you know what you are writing about? Do you know more than the usual journalist?

What do you want to say? What is the point?

Who is the audience? Write for them

Short sentences (English, not German)

Topic paragraphs & sentences

Introduction & conclusion

Write with flair: “Chance of a snowball in hell”

Rule # 1 Cont. - Writing Well

“As appealing as steak tartar to a vegan”

“Chance of an EPP student in a Part A Oral”

Choose stimulating phrase relevant to topic

Express thoughts clearly

One point at a time

Examples to illustrate points

“Appropriate” humor always good – funeral?

Farmer’s daughter vs. wit & warmth –
appropriate also means relevant

Rule # 2: Think Out the Topic

- What do you want to say?
- Does anyone except your mother care?
- Is your point insightful?
- Are there important policy implications?
- Has a similar point already been made?
- Is this your opinion or can you support it?
- Is the subject topical? News peg?
- Is your advice practical?

Rule #3: Select the Media

- Which publication/radio/TV show is interested in this topic?
- Are they likely to appreciate your view?
Wall Street Journal vs. NY Times
- Is the topic & level appropriate?
- What is the “house” style/length/rules?
Usually 800 words for newspapers
- First 1-2 sentences must catch the reader

Rule #4: Be Lucky

- NY Times receives almost 100 submissions for each one it publishes
- NY Times doesn't tell you no
- Newspapers prefer their columnists
- Most op-eds are commissioned – from prestigious people
- The odds are against you – but payoff can be huge

Conclusion

- All this applies to grant applications, journal articles - everything you write
- Select research topics that matter
- If you can't write an op-ed or articulate your findings in 60 seconds, your thinking is muddled – what is the headline?
- This isn't poetry: Only your mother will take the time to figure out what you are trying to say