Op-Ed Checklist to Keep You on Track

* Focus tightly on one issue or idea — in your first paragraph. Be brief.
* Be timely. If your essay is responding to current events, the quicker you can write and promote it, the better. You have days, not weeks.
* Express your opinion, and then base it on factual, researched or first-hand information.
* Be controversial, but not outrageous. Be the voice of reason.
* Be personal and conversational; it can help you make your point. No one likes a stuffed shirt.
* Be humorous, provided that your topic lends itself to humor. Irony can also be effective.
* Have a clear editorial viewpoint — come down hard on one side of the issue. Don’t equivocate.
* Provide insight, understanding: educate your reader without being preachy.
* Near the end, clearly re-state your position and issue a [call to action](https://writetodone.com/call-to-action/). Don’t philosophize.
* Have verve and “fire in the gut” indignation to accompany your logical analysis.
* Don’t ramble or let your op-ed unfold slowly, as in an essay.
* Use clear, powerful, direct language.
* Emphasize active verbs, forget adjectives and adverbs, [which only weaken writing](https://writetodone.com/the-second-golden-rule-of-writing/).
* Avoid clichés and jargon.
* Appeal to the average reader. Clarity is paramount.
* Write 750 double-spaced words or less (fewer is always better) for newspapers, but your piece can go longer for your blog. Remember, shorter is always better.
* Include [a brief bio](https://selfpublishing.com/author-bio/), along with your phone number, email address, and mailing address at the bottom if your article goes to a newspaper.

How to Submit Your Op-Ed

First, read up in the opinion section of the publication you’re aiming for. If the topic you’re addressing has recently been covered from the same angle/opinion, there’s a good chance yours won’t be accepted. Do you homework first to ensure that you have the best chance of getting accepted.

Most major newspapers today accept timely op-eds by email. Check the paper’s website first to be sure what its policy is. While it’s tempting to fire off your op-ed to *The New York Times*, remember that there are many other major newspapers to consider. *The New York Times* receives more op-eds daily than any other paper in the US, so competition there is fierce. It’s better to be published in another excellent paper than to be not published in*The New York Times*.

[Here is an example](http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2018355922_guest05mclain.html)of an op-ed I wrote for *The Seattle Times*.

*John McLain is author of*How to Promote Your Home Business*and a novel,*The Reckoning*, both available at Amazon.com. His screenplay based on his novel was a finalist in the Writer’s Digest International Writing Competition. He has been a newspaper reporter on major dailies, an ad copywriter, and a magazine editor.*