

One effective way to advocate for your priorities, and elevate your voice (or your students' voice) in service of a cause, is by writing an op-ed. To serve you in this effort, NCAN has drafted a guide of general tips and an outline to help you get started. Writing as an advocacy tool allows you to bring attention to an issue and share personal experiences. Your advocacy plays a great role in policy change.

Suggestions

- **Keep it brief.** Conventional wisdom says an op-ed should not exceed 700 words. Check with the media organization you are targeting on its requirements. With word count in mind, your op-ed should be focused on a single topic and employ short sentences/paragraphs. (Resource: [More Than You Wanted to Know About Op-ed Length](#))
- **Include a call to action.** Invite your reader to be a part of the solution by offering a specific recommendation. State the call to action in the opening, and restate it at the end of your piece.
- **Bring yourself to the piece.** As a professional/practitioner, you are uniquely qualified to speak on certain issues and weigh in on policy discussions. Moreover, humanizing a complex issue will help you reach your audience, especially given that policy debates are often reduced to matters of technical changes.
- **Consider timing.** Knowing when to elevate the discussion of an issue is key. Timing can determine how your piece will be received, and how it will be acted upon, by your intended audience.

Outline

Opening:

- The [lede](#), or introductory sentence, is important to grab your audience's attention.
- Distill the issue in concise and simple terms; assume your audience knows little about the subject. Balance the right amount of context and framing to educate your audience.
- Personalize the issue to an appropriate extent.
- Involve your audience in your recommended solution or call to action.

Body:

- Support your solution/call to action with compelling arguments and verifiable facts.
- There's no rule here, but limit your body to only the strongest arguments in favor of your issue. This could be one argument or three, but the priority is to introduce and organize the content in a way that's manageable for your audience.
- For the sake of transparency and gaining your audience's trust, you may want to state an oppositional argument, while also refuting its substance or diminishing this argument's magnitude.
- You may use data points to support your arguments, but op-eds traditionally avoid getting too into the weeds on issues.

Conclusion:

- Close out your piece by restating the issue and your recommended solution/call to action for your intended audience.

Examples of NCAN and NCAN Member Op-Eds

- “[Double the Pell Grant for the best return on investment for students and taxpayers](#)” – The Hill, May 2019
- “[‘Sugar high’ won’t solve college crisis](#)” by Andrew Bramson – Providence Journal, May 2019

Additional Resources

- [Tips for pitching an op-ed](#) (via The OpEd Project)