

Op-ed

Definition of genre

An op-ed is an opinion piece written by the reader of a newspaper, magazine, or other source, on a topic relevant to the publication's audience. The term comes from "opposite editorial"—"the page of a newspaper facing the editorial page, typically devoted to personal comment and feature articles" (OED).

Questions to ask

- Consider your audience: Who are they? Are they readers of a small-town newspaper, a technical journal, a national newspaper, an independent activist press, etc.?
- What do they already know about the issue, and what do you need to tell them?
- Why is your issue important?
- What action would you like your readers (or Congress, or City Council, or the dean, or...) to take?
- Why should readers trust your opinion? That is, why should they find your particular perspective, expertise, or experience worth thinking about?

Actions to take

- Have an opinion: take a stance.
- Make your point early on. The very first sentence should give readers a sense of what your topic will be. How will that sentence grab your readers' attention? How will the first paragraph make readers stay with you to the end?
- Be respectful of counterarguments. Acknowledge—but do not slander—opposing viewpoints.
- Pick up an actual newspaper and read the op-ed pages. Durham's *Herald Sun* and *The New York Times* are available to students for free in the lobby of the Marketplace on East Campus.

Helpful links

<http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/courses/op-ed>

A webpage on writing successful op-eds, from Duke's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. The site also provides links to the op-ed pages of several national, regional, and college newspapers.

<http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/courses/op-ed/examples.html>

Examples of good op-eds courtesy of Duke's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy.