

working with the media: writing an op-ed

why write an op-ed?

An op-ed, short for “opposite the editorial page”, is an opinion piece written by an author not affiliated with the publishing newspaper or magazine. Publishing an op-ed is a great opportunity for informed and passionate volunteers to get their message into the press and raise awareness about important issues.

Through the power of social media and electronic publications, op-eds are an effective way to share your message with a wide range of people. Specifically, people like your **Member of Parliament (MP)** and other important decision makers are the people you want your article to reach. Op-eds also stimulate interest among journalists. If they see that there are readers who are interested in international development, they will be more likely to write articles about the kind of topics that we really care about.

choosing your publication

In order to reach MPs, the best publication to focus on is local and national newspapers. Consult Results Canada’s **listing of newspapers** to find the best publication for you. Think about the audience you are trying to target and which publications they are likely to read. It is important to get to know your target audience before you start writing.

- What types of articles do the newspapers publish? What issues are they interested in? What kinds of op-eds have they published in the past?
- Check for guidelines on how to submit an op-ed as these vary for each newspaper. You are usually required to provide your full name, address, and a contact phone number.
- Which day does it come out? If it’s a daily paper, you don’t stand much chance of publication if you’re writing about an event that took place two weeks prior.
- Choose your timing carefully. Your op-ed likely won’t be published immediately so be sure to submit it well in advance of when you’d like it published. Once they’ve agreed to publish it, check your facts and make necessary changes to be sure that your op-ed is up to date.

finding and creating hooks

A “hook” will help to get your op-ed published and noticed but it’s not the end of the world if you don’t find one. Look through your chosen newspaper and see how many stories you can make into a hook. The trick is to think laterally and be creative. Think about basic issues that the readers have in common with people who live in poor conditions in the Global South – children, health, education, etc. Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

Education: “While I am, of course, delighted at the \$3 million extra awarded for public schools and their facilities (Daily Echo, 10 April), I can’t help but contrast it with another report I read today about the 57 million children in the world who have no access to education at all.”

Health: “I sympathize with the Canadians who wait two days to see their family doctor. For many people with TB in India, there is no doctor and no drugs.”

A hook is not essential. If you can’t find one, don’t despair – use another excuse like a personal anecdote: “Over the last few months, my baby daughter has been vaccinated against virtually all the childhood illnesses that plagued my own childhood.” Or mention a recent event in Canada to help your point hit close to home: “The prime minister’s recent announcement of a close to 16-per-cent increase in support for the Global Fund is good news for Canada and the world.” Check out the op-ed [Fighting global disease can also help transform women's lives](#) by two Results Canada volunteers!

A calendar date: “Tomorrow – World AIDS Day – gives us the opportunity to reflect on the impact this disease is having around the world.”

Need more inspiration?

Consult Results Canada’s [publications webpage](#).

successful op-eds

Keep it direct and to the point, around 700-800 words. Avoid international development jargon and keep the language simple. Be opinionated but don’t rant. Don’t be afraid to be contentious; let your feelings be heard in a respectful way.

Name drop! Politicians will keep a careful eye on when and where their name is mentioned in the media. If you include the name of your MP or another key decision-maker such as the Prime Minister, you can guarantee that they, or at least someone from their office, will take notice.

Co-author. Your message will be all the more powerful if you can include two perspectives, particularly if your co-author is an expert on the subject.

aim for a start, a middle, and an end

- **Start** – tell the reader what you’re talking about. Put the hook in if you have one.
- **Middle** – share some facts about the issue. “People in this country may not realize that there are still more than 57 million children around the world who are not in school.”
- **End** – tell the reader what they can do. A call to action or just to think about the issue: “I ask readers to write to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and ask for his support in calling for more money for the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria.”

(Refer to our tips on [how to communicate powerfully](#) for more including the EPIC format and storytelling.)

completing and sending

Having written your op-ed, don’t get stuck in thinking “this isn’t good enough”. Send it anyway. If you need help drafting your op-ed, don’t be afraid to ask other members of your Results group or the wider volunteer network. Consult our [10 tips to get your op-ed published](#) to increase your chances of publication. Be proud of your op-ed and take the time to congratulate yourself. Give it even more wings by publishing it on social media via your Twitter account and tagging your MP. Make sure to report on your submitted op-ed to the Results Canada office via the online report available on the [website](#).

Make sure to follow up by phone and email a couple days after sending your op-ed. Editors are busy and it is likely you won’t hear back right away, so persevere and continue selling your piece. If it doesn’t look like your op-ed will be published, don’t give up! Ask for feedback, send it to another editor, and keep asking for feedback.

Don't forget to include a catchy title and a photo related to your topic, as well as a short bio about yourself with your name, address, and phone number so the editor can contact you.

monitoring

Follow up to see if your op-ed has been published. If you don't normally buy the paper yourself, ask a friend, neighbour, or colleague who does to look for your op-ed. You can also do an online search to find out if it has been published. When it is published, share it with the Results office (via the [online reporting system](#)) and with other members of your group. You can have an even greater impact by sending a copy of your letter to your local MP (or again, tweet it out to them) or whoever it is that you want to take action. Again, take time to be proud of your achievement!

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