

Op-Ed Writing Guide

Sample Op-Ed Structure

While newspapers and news include a lot of content that follows the news—reporting on the hard facts of cases in an (often) dispassionate or objective voice—opinion pieces allow you to express your point of view with personal and fiery language. **Opinion pieces should come from your point of view, tell the stories that matter to you, and say something that is unique.** They should be factually based, but the facts should not be the focus of the piece, but rather the evidence for your position. Unlike traditional reporting, Op-Eds can and should include you as the writer.

The power of an Op-Ed lies in how you're able to make the facts personal, and lived. Picture standard news coverage as the list of ingredients and the cooking method, and picture Op-Eds as the taste of the dish. Below are some writing tips for a successful Op-Ed, including an idea for a paragraph by paragraph structure, key facts you may want to include, and past templates we have used to create drafts.

1st Paragraph:

Begin your draft with a first line that will catch the eye of the editor. Remember, consider where you will be pitching your draft. It's likely that you'll be trying to get this published locally, so think about what would make a reader take the time out of their day to consider your point of view. This is also a moment to establish your voice, show why you're writing about this issue, and why you're writing about it now.

2nd Paragraph:

This is the paragraph that you can use to address the context for why you're writing about this issue. The August 31 deadline for withdrawal from Afghanistan is quickly approaching and we need to urge the administration to do all it can to evacuate Afghan refugees. Stress that resettling refugees has been endorsed historically by both Republican and Democrat presidents, let the reader know that this shouldn't be a partisan issue, but an American one. Let them know that we made a promise to the Afghan people, breaking that promise is not only a moral failure, but a failure of national security.

3rd Paragraph:

We now have paragraphs that address why you're writing and a bit of the context of the issue. Now is the time to make your piece strike a chord. Make it resonate by telling a short anecdote about your experience as a either a member of the faith community by quoting scripture, your friendship with a member of the refugee community by talking about a watershed moment for you in realizing the importance of welcoming refugees, or if you served in the military alongside foreign nationals, their importance to you and your mission. Likewise, if you are a refugee or a SIV recipient, write about your journey and the hardships you faced, while highlighting your triumphs now that you've been resettled. Don't be afraid to make it personal and speak to your passion - this isn't an academic paper, this is your story.

4th Paragraph:

Now you can pivot back to some of the specifics you're calling for: let's extend the withdrawal from Afghanistan as long as possible, let's provide a pathway to safety for those in Kabul and beyond, and return to our tradition of welcoming the stranger and being a beacon for the world's vulnerable. It's also an opportunity to call on your member of Congress to push President Biden to take action. Here's some example language, so don't use this directly, but make it your own:

"President Biden is holding to a deadline that is arbitrary and harmful. Any delay in evacuating is devastating to the Afghans who are in life-threatening situations within Afghanistan and for their loved ones awaiting them in the United States. We have a moral obligation to create a safe pathway out of Afghanistan for all those in danger to U.S. territory—for as long as it takes to get the job done. With the Taliban now blocking access to the Kabul airport, attacks on women and children escalating, and the targeting of men and women who worked alongside the United States persisting, I'm calling on [[Representative Name/Senator Name]] to make President Biden recognize that leaving our allies behind is never acceptable."

5th Paragraph:

Underline the roles that refugees play in your community. They are business owners, tax payers, parents, workers, volunteers, and more. You've told your story above, now paint it a bit more broadly so the reader can make the connection to someone in their network. For example:

Refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. [They/We] are doctors, teachers, lawyers, business owners, craftsmen, and musicians. As the Taliban solidifies its hold in Afghanistan, we have a moral obligation to

Afghan refugees seeking a chance to rebuild their lives and create a better future for their families. Refugees are no different than each of our families and ancestors, who have sought safety and welcome.

6th Paragraph:

This will be the closing of your draft. Make it short and simple and don't reiterate all the points you've made above. Instead use it as a call to action. Again, another example for you to make your own:

As a proud [Texan, Tennessean, Coloradan, etc] my duty is to make sure we honor both our word as a nation and the spirit of this great state by bringing these people to their new home. To do otherwise would be to dishonor our legacy of welcome and turn our back on what made us what we are today.

Lastly, include your one line bio in italics at the end, for example:

Jane Smith is pastor at XXXX Church in Houston.

Or *John Smith is a refugee from XXXX living in Houston.*

Or *Jane Smith is CEO and President of XXXX, a [type of business] located in Houston.*

Pitching Your Op-Ed

When pitching your Op-Ed or announcing your availability for interviews, it is important to keep your pitch short and on message. Most editors and outlets prefer pitches over email or through a submission form on their website. It is important to keep your pitch as short as possible, as reporters are often on a deadline and receive many story pitches every day. Open your pitch with an interesting first line and relate the pitch back to another story the reporter has recently written to increase the likelihood of the reporter picking up your story. Please see the draft pitch below for an example email.

When pitching your Op-Ed, look into what the particular news outlet has printed recently for how you can highlight your piece as showcasing a different and needed perspective for the publication's readers.

Only pitch your Op-Ed to **one outlet at a time**, offering it as an exclusive. If you have not heard from the editor after 24 hours, follow up by thanking them for their consideration and offer to answer any questions they may have about the piece. If, however, the editor hasn't responded within 48 hours after your follow-up email, send a friendly email thanking the editor again for their consideration and let them know that you are taking the piece elsewhere in the interest of keeping it timely (ex: "Thank you again for your consideration of my opinion piece on evacuating Afghans, however, in the interests of keeping it timely, I'm going to take this elsewhere. I'll be sure and reach out to you next time I have something that I think your readers would be interested in").

Lastly, more and more, people are reluctant to open attached files in emails from someone they don't know, so I suggest pasting the text of your Op-Ed below your pitch.

Draft Pitch Email for Op-Ed

Dear Editor,

As the situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate and as President Biden's deadline for U.S. withdrawal approaches, I wanted to offer for your exclusive consideration an article detailing my experience with [[refugees/SIV recipients]] that reaffirms the need to evacuate Afghans from the country as soon as possible.

As a [[faith leader/veteran/community leader]] I have long known the importance of refugees in [[City/Town Name]] and I think your readers will appreciate my thoughts.

Please feel free to contact me at EMAIL or over the phone at PHONE NUMBER if you have any questions or would like to discuss the piece in greater detail. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,
NAME