

LTE's/Op-Eds for Progressive Advocacy



A guide for brainstorming, writing and getting published

Resources/Quick Links:

- [Resource with Contacts/Guidelines for Submitting LTEs in Massachusetts](#)
- [Sample LTE](#), [sample Op-Ed](#), [sample Op-Ed II](#)
- Want more support/feedback? Reach out to info@actonmass.org.

What is a LTE/Op-Ed?

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are short opinion pieces (typically under 250 words) usually written by community members in direct response to an article, editorial, op-ed, or column that the target paper has printed. They can also be a reaction to or notification of a newsworthy event. They are printed on the editorial page, one of the most-read pages in the paper, making them an effective way of reaching a large audience in the community.

Op-Ed's are slightly longer opinion pieces; generally they run about 750 words or less. They do not need to be in specific response to a recent article or local event. Since Op-Ed's are longer, they leave more space to tell your story, explain nuances, etc. The tradeoff is that they're harder to get published, and often have a longer turnaround time compared to LTEs.

When choosing whether to write a LTE or an Op-Ed, you should consider the size/popularity of your target publication (and therefore how likely you are to be published), the timeline of the campaign, and whether you can make a clear connection to a recent article or event. Both types of opinion pieces are good options that help our campaign!

Why are LTE's/Op-Ed's useful as an organizing tactic?

- **To reach more people:** Opinion pieces can call the public's attention to issues that aren't always covered in traditional news media. They're one useful way to reach a wide cross-section of a community, and get beyond an audience of political insiders. They can also help break down complex, inaccessible issues into language that is easy for people to digest.



- **To demonstrate public support:** A LTE/Op-Ed campaign, where multiple advocates submit pieces to a variety of local news outlets, demonstrates to newspaper editors, public officials and key stakeholders that there is public support for your issue.
- **To inform and influence decision-makers:** Legislators and their staff read op-eds and LTEs to keep up with community concerns and priorities. Like a campaign mobilizing advocates to call and email their representatives, LTE/Op-Ed campaigns are one way we can demonstrate to legislators which issues their constituency cares about.

Step 1: Brainstorm

- Will you choose to write a LTE or Op-Ed?
- What is your personal connection to your issue- why does it matter to you? What compelled you to get involved? What personal stake do you have in the issue?
- More questions to consider as you're writing:
 - Why should readers trust you?
 - Can you back up what you say?
 - What's new/why is this relevant right now?
 - Why is this important?
 - How will your ideas and arguments contribute to the conversation, and be helpful to your audience?

Step 2: Pick a Publication

- Look at your local publications, or any larger ones that make sense. Local newspapers usually have an online page with information on how to submit a LTE or Op-Ed. Look for any length guidelines/word limits, and see what other pieces they've published recently.
 - It's best to avoid using submission forms that are available on the website, since they are often flooded with submissions/not checked frequently. Try to find the email of an opinion editor or staff person that covers opinions. If it's not on the website, try searching Google or Twitter. As a last resort, submit via website form if one is available.
- You can send your opinion piece to multiple publications simultaneously, especially if it's an LTE. For Op-Eds, which are harder to get published and contain more original material, it's usually best to send it to your top choice first, wait a couple of days for a response, and then send it elsewhere.

- Questions to consider as you're choosing a publication: who reads this publication? Who will read your piece? What issues will speak to locals and move them to action?

Step 3: Write!

- Start with a **lede** (a compelling opening sentence). This could be a connection to a recent article, a local event, or a personal story- something to pull the reader in and establish relevance/purpose.
 - *Example 1: "AS WE FIXATE on the presidential election, ensuring that all votes are counted and yearning for a peaceful transition of power, we must avoid the smokescreen of national politics. Democracy that affects us most directly lives — or dies — at the Massachusetts State House. And mostly it dies."*
 - *Example 2: "American democracy was born in Massachusetts. In our State House, it's struggling to survive. Despite a Democratic supermajority in the State House, many progressive bills with broad public support, such as the Safe Communities Act, languish in committee rooms for years at a time. We have not seen comprehensive climate change legislation in 12 years. In a poignant example, following the 2020 election, which brought to light issues of voter suppression, the popular policy of same-day voter registration has not seen action in 16 years."*
- Make the **body** of the piece your own. Like a persuasive essay, it's helpful to go in with a central argument or thesis. Tell your story and present your argument.
- End with a **call to action**. You want readers to walk away feeling empowered with something concrete that they can do to support your campaign. This call to action will vary depending on your issue and publication, but it's a good idea to choose an action that is easy, accessible, and quick.
 - *Example 1: "American democracy was born in Massachusetts. We cannot let it die here. Contact your representatives today to let them know that transparency is a priority for you."*
 - *Example 2: "ACT on MASS believes that constituent power can change this. To learn more or attend a Zoom meeting with your representative go to the ACT on MASS Transparency Campaign website or Facebook page. Then contact friends and neighbors and get involved before January. Let's start rebuilding democracy on Beacon Hill!"*

Step 4: Submit your piece

- Your submission process will vary slightly based on whether you're submitting an LTE or Op-Ed.
- **If you're submitting an LTE**, all you need to do is put your letter in the body of an email, and send it to the editor of the publication. You should start your letter with "Dear (editor's name)", and end with a signature including your name, title/organizational affiliation, email, and hometown.
- Since **Op-Ed's** are longer, and a little more difficult to get published, it helps to send the editor a brief **pitch**. A pitch is a short email that conveys what you'd like to write about to the opinion section editors. Editors get a lot of requests to publish op-eds, so it's best to communicate your piece in a few sentences so they can quickly see if they are interested in your voice and perspective. Underneath the pitch, **include your finished piece pasted directly into the email rather than as an attachment**. This makes it as easy as possible for editors to read your piece.

A successful pitch is 1) timely, 2) well-written, 3) brief and clear, 4) conveys expertise, and 5) communicates an unexpected point of view. Example op-ed pitches can be found [here](#).

An effective email pitch answers these basic questions:

- **Why now?** What's the news hook? Why is this worth reading at this moment?
- **Why should people care?** What does transparency mean to you and your community?
- **Why me?** Why are you the best one to write this piece? (include your credentials, but only those that are relevant. Highlight your experience, degrees, expertise, etc. This is where you are encouraged to brag, but be concise.)

Step 5: Follow Up!

- **If the editor responds:** Thank your editor, even if they said "no." Remember that "no" can be the beginning of a conversation that can eventually lead to "yes." If they published you, thank them for giving space to the ideas and issues.
- **If the editor doesn't respond:** Don't take it personally! Depending on the size of their publication, editors may be getting anywhere from tens to hundreds of pitches every week.



- **Have a time limit.** If your idea has a very short window of relevance, you might give an editor a day or less to respond; if it's not as time sensitive, you may give a week or more. Then send a polite follow-up email to the editor saying that you'd still like to run your piece in their publication, but since the piece is timely, if you don't hear from them by the end of the day (week, whatever) you will assume they have passed, and you'll be submitting your op-ed elsewhere.

Good luck!