



**Planet  
Detroit**

# 2023 Editorial Resource Guide



# How To Write An Op-Ed For Environmental Orgs



Planet Detroit regularly publishes Op-Eds from citizens and leaders of environmental organizations. We and other local media have a direct reach to community members. By tapping into this audience, organizations can foster a sense of community involvement and drive local action.

Op-Eds provide an opportunity to frame complex environmental concerns in relatable, human-centric narratives. This can help demystify complex subjects, making them more accessible and actionable for everyday readers. And they allow organizations to highlight successes and showcase local examples of environmental impact.

## What is an Op-Ed?

An Op-Ed is a late 20th century literary invention, originally created by the New York Times to augment its editorial page with outside opinion. The term has come into general usage to mean a short (about 700 to 800 words) opinion piece in a newspaper, magazine or online news site that's selected and published by the editorial (or opinion) editors.

An Op-Ed writer can advocate for a cause or change, political or cultural, or expound on a newsworthy topic in pointed commentary. Writing an Op-Ed is a way for anyone with a cogent point of view or cause to reach a publication's audience, advancing an argument or helping to sharpen public awareness of a problem. The editors are seeking expertise, so it will help to have official status in an organization or unique and relevant experience if you want your piece published.

An Op-Ed is opinion, but it should be based on facts and specific detail, written clearly and with a distinct voice.

## Where do I start?

**You have a topic, an idea that you want to express. Ask yourself some basic questions:**

- 1 What can I say about this subject that others can't or have not?
- 2 Is this topic of general interest? Will a publication's readers want to hear my argument or point of view?
- 3 List three or four strong points or ideas you can use to explore and explain the topic.
- 4 **RESEARCH** your topic. This can mean a trip to the library or to authoritative websites that provide reliable data. You may want to call other experts to refine your point of view, offer background information or to quote directly in your piece.

## The Lede or Opening

A strong beginning is essential, especially for your first reader, the editor who may decide to publish your piece. Choose carefully. Op-Eds can open with a compelling statement, an anecdote, a historical nugget or even a personal revelation. Craft an opening that draws the reader into the piece and encourages more exploration.

*Example:*

*A costly Michigan tax break intended to reduce air pollution has been a boon for one of Detroit's biggest polluters: Marathon Petroleum. See OPINION: How one of Detroit's biggest polluters gets a massive tax break... for 'not polluting' June 2023.*

## The Main Piece

Write with a strong voice. You are the author: Make your presence felt.

In an Op-Ed, you can use first-person or not, but write with clarity, a lack of industry jargon or showy vocabulary and a sense of purpose.

Writing with detail and precision is a way to enhance your voice and authority. Another way to think about this: Avoid generalizations. Be specific.

In an opinion piece, you can assert facts and make value judgments on your own

authority, but do so credibly. Familiarize yourself with the publication you are pitching and adjust your voice to complement its overall tone and level of sophistication.

Some experts suggest reading your piece aloud as a way to spot errors in fluency, grammar and factual credibility. It can also be a way to recognize potential errors in logic and reasoning.

You can enhance your own authority and credibility by acknowledging counter-arguments, rather than disdainfully dismissing them.

## Endings

Like the lede, the close of your Op-Ed is important: It's the place where you can summarize, reflect back to the opening or find an elegant bit of language – a metaphor, a clever phrase – to bring the piece to an end. Any of these approaches can work, if the reader gets a sense of clarity and resolution from the close.

*Examples:*

*The work ahead is hard. But it's time to get started. See: OPINION: DTE & Consumers Energy offered clear lessons at this week's power outage hearings. March 2023.*

*Do better, Detroit—fund recreation, not more cops. See: OPINION: More stewardship, not cops, needed at Detroit Parks August 2023.*

## Check Your Work

1

After reading your piece aloud, make appropriate revisions.

2

Check for spelling and grammar errors.

3

Be vigilant about any facts you have asserted: Identify or link to your sources.

4

Question your own reasoning and look for obvious flaws in your argument. Be your best and most critical reader.





# Pitching & Promoting

## Strategizing Your Writer

- Before pitching an Op-Ed, consider who's writing the piece.
- You'll have a better chance at securing an op-ed if the writer is:
  1. An executive, leader or brand ambassador.
  2. Well known, respected and credible.
  3. An expert on the topic.
  4. Someone with a social media following.
  5. A decent writer.

## What Makes an Op-Ed Newsworthy?

### Before writing, ask yourself. Does the piece...

- Start or advance a societal conversation?
- Hold people in power accountable?
- Call attention to overlooked problems?
- Explain or debunk a trending topic?
- Give context to a current event or issue?
- Answer a question readers may want to know?
- Share something new that hasn't been reported on in the media?

## Crafting Your Pitch

### A good pitch includes:

- The 5 W's: Who, What, When, Where, Why
- What sources you'll interview or cite
- How long the editorial may be
- Why you're the best person to write this piece

*Pro tip: You can send your pitch without sending the written editorial. If the editor likes your pitch, you can then send the full piece!*



## Fact-Checking Your Piece

**The editor approved your pitch, and you've written the op-ed! Before filing it, *always*:**

### 1. Double and triple check the spelling of any names.

- No one wants to see their name misspelled in print!  
Jane Smith could easily be Jayne Smythe.
- Include the name of the writer at the top. This is called the byline.

### 2. Make sure any person referenced in the piece has a title.

- Ex: vice president, owner, professor, etc.
- If writing about an everyday citizen, provide their city of residence and age if possible.

### 3. Check all statistics and data.

- Editors appreciate links to reports, surveys, studies and any figures found online.
- Ensure statistics are recent. Anything past 5 years ago may be outdated.
- Try to avoid citing other media outlets. The Detroit Free Press will not want to cite something reported in The Detroit News.

### 4. Include the writer's bio (a few sentences written in third person) at the bottom of the piece.

*Ex: Jeremy Orr is a Detroit-based environmental and civil rights lawyer, a law professor at Michigan State University College of Law where he teaches water law, and a Planet Detroit Advisory Board member.*

## 7 Ways to Promote our Editorial

### 1 Post on all social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X)

- Share on your personal platforms and your nonprofit's.
- For Instagram, turn the text into a carousel.
- Ask 5 thought leaders, executives or influencers in your space to personally share it on their social media platforms.
- If you mention other nonprofits, businesses, schools or entities in a positive light, email the published link to them and ask them to share it on social media.
- The media outlet will likely post it on their social channels. Reshare that post!
- If the piece is in print, share a photo of you holding your story in the newspaper or magazine. Caption: "Just published! Check out my piece on...in The Detroit Free Press!"



### 2 Share in your newsletter.

- It's ok to dedicate a whole newsletter to a media mention!
- Copy and paste the first few paragraphs and then add a "click to read the full piece" button.
- Image idea: Take a screenshot of the published piece under the media outlet's name.

### 3 Personally email it to your grant partners and donors. Ask them to share it.

- This helps you:
- Stay connected.
- Show what you're up to.
- Solicit future funding.
- You can also share it with prospective funders!

### 4 Reprint the article and distribute.

- If it's in a print newspaper or magazine, you can always ask an editor for the PDF of the page.
- You can then print 8 x 11 copies for your physical lobby, events, conference booths, etc.

### 5 Republish a portion in marketing materials, flyers, etc.

### 6 Include it in grant proposals as "additional documents."

### 7 Use the op-ed to pitch your next one.

- All editors like to know where you have been published.
- Include the link in future pitches to show your writing style and credibility.

## Out-of-the-Box Ways to Promote Your Piece

### 1. Link it in your email signature at the bottom.

*Ex: Check out my piece in Planet Detroit about "INSERT TOPIC."*

### 2. Include it in an out of office message.

*Ex: I am away and will respond to your message when I return.*

*In the meantime, check out my piece about INSERT TOPIC published in Planet Detroit.*

*Or*

*Ex: I am away and will respond to your message when I return.*

*If you agree that power outages are a public health concern, check out my piece in Planet Detroit about why we need a legislative solution.*

### 3. Boost your post on Facebook or Instagram by turning it into a paid ad.