

Op-Ed Tips for Abstinence Education Grantees

Opinion-Editorials (or Op-Eds) are not easy to get published. But it is worth trying – if you have something interesting and/or provocative to say.

While op-eds are not all that effective at impacting the *general public*, they are *very effective at reaching* community leaders, lawmakers, policymakers, and other influencers. Here are a handful of tips for writing an effective op-ed:

1. **Short is best:** Make your goal approximately 500 words.
2. **Go light on statistics:** Data and statistics can certainly bolster an argument but should be used sparingly. Too many data items and statistics bore and overwhelm the reader and practically guarantee an editor will not publish the piece.
3. **Make it relevant:** “Hook” the piece to something in the news. The more local the news, the better. For example, a report on youth outcome data in the state, city or county, or something – good or bad – that happened at a local school.
4. **Organize your presentation:** You are trying to present a persuasive argument. Make sure your 500 words are presented in an organized fashion so that each point logically follows the preceding point. Lead the reader in a straight line.
5. **Bring the piece to life:** Illustrate your points with one or more real life examples. Tell a story and “hang” your major points on the story.
6. **Communicate:** Don’t look to impress with big words and fancy sentence structure; your goal is to communicate a point of view in an interesting and enjoyable fashion. Read some of our most popular syndicated columnists. They are reporting or presenting an argument. They generally use simple and clear language.
7. **Be provocative:** If your op-ed doesn’t challenge the reader to think and, perhaps, challenge some preconceived notions, there’s no reason for an editor to publish it. Remember, though, there’s a difference between being provocative and being bombastic. A provocative statement challenges the reader. For example, “Contrary to conventional wisdom, there’s no such thing as safe sex.” A bombastic statement attacks the reader. For example, “[Insert group/agency here] think it’s okay for 15-year-olds to have sex.”
8. **Be enjoyable:** If you didn’t enjoy writing the piece, and reading what you have written, neither will the editor and his or her readers.
9. **Review the op-ed:** Have the op-ed reviewed for clarity and intentionality before submitting it.

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