



Tips for Writing an Opinion Editorial

(Updated August 14, 2023)

Opinion pieces can play a crucial role in highlighting AmeriCorps' significance to the work of local organizations and its impact on American society, amplified by a trusted journalism outlet. These pieces can shed light on the transformative experience of AmeriCorps members and partners and, most importantly, show AmeriCorps' vital importance to the community.

Here are some tips for writing your opinion editorial or op-ed. Please contact Shanelle Oliver at soliver2@cityyear.org if you need any help with drafting or placing your op-ed.

1. **Make sure it communicates an opinion:** The purpose of an op-ed is to offer an opinion on a topic that is timely and unique. Your chances of getting your op-ed published are much stronger if you can connect your submission to the current news cycle and make it relevant to local readers.
2. **Grab the reader's attention at the top:** From the first line, your op-ed should compel readers to keep reading and not lose their attention to another headline. Try to avoid an opening that is just background information. Instead, write an opening that says something new or clever.
3. **Write fast, edit deliberately: You should be able to communicate** what you are trying to say in one sentence (journalists call this the "budget line"). Build out your draft or outline from there. As you write your thoughts down on paper, connect them back to that one line.
4. **Keep it simple:** The goal of an op-ed is to persuade. To persuade someone, they must understand your message. When you are trying to articulate your opinion, write how you speak. For example, you would not say: "We are experiencing precipitation and I failed to secure the entrance." You would say "It's raining, and I forgot to lock the door." In most cases, short, simple sentences are best. While writing with lofty vocabulary and jargon may impress experts, it can lose the attention of a typical reader. Let verbs be verbs and try to avoid adverbs – and avoid jargon and acronyms. It is helpful to read your draft out loud once you are complete, as areas of improvement will become clear when you hear your draft aloud.
5. **Emotional connection:** To persuade your intended audience, your writing must inspire an emotional connection in the reader. You want the reader to care about your cause. If your piece does not make someone think about your issue, it's not going to bring them to your side.
6. **Use examples:** Readers often do not remember facts or statistics, but they will remember people. People desire emotion and connection. They are more sympathetic motivators than any organization. Real-life examples can help humanize a complex topic. Anecdotes also provide opportunities to include

and activate local people who have benefited from AmeriCorps who may be interested in advocating for the program.

7. **Conclusion.** It often helps to end with a call to action, such as urging your members of Congress to support AmeriCorps.
8. **Length.** Op-eds are typically 500 – 750 words in length and it helps to know the word guidelines before you start drafting. You can typically google the name of the paper and “submitting an op-ed” to find the information.
9. **Getting placed:** When you have a strong piece, it is time to pitch it.
 - a. Landing a placement requires identifying an outlet that is a good fit for the target audience. For AmeriCorps partner organizations, it will most likely be a local community or regional paper.
 - b. To find submission instructions, google the name of the paper and “submitting an op-ed.” You will likely get a general email address. If possible, also look up the name of the opinion page editor and include them in the email as well. Paste the op-ed into the body of the email. Do not send it as an attachment.
 - c. Unless your paper has a form submission, include a concise pitch note when submitting. When writing it, try to think about how to recycle your “one sentence” that captures what you have to say in the op-ed. You do not need to fully contextualize your piece beyond 2-3 sentences of what you seek to convey and why they should be interested.
 - d. It is helpful to have an eye-catching subject line, as editors receive many submissions each day. You need to give the paper three days to get back to you (and, unfortunately, many do not respond if they decide not to publish your piece). Before you move on to another outlet, email again (and try to call) to check on the status of your piece.
 - e. Include your name, email address and phone number in your submission, and let them know that the piece is unique to their paper.
10. **If your piece is accepted:** Your piece may receive a few tweaks and note that editors often change headlines. Once the piece has been published, do not forget to use the publication’s link across your social channels, in newsletters, and in other owned stakeholder email distributions. Also, email your published piece to Sarah Aldridge at sarah.aldridge@cityyear.org so Voices for National Service can also share across our communication channels. Extra amplification can go a long way toward getting your message to – and reinforcing it with – the right audience.
11. **Op-ed alternatives:** If you are struggling to place a piece, don’t give up! It is still impactful to publish the piece using your own channels, such as a blog post on your website, or through a post on a site that are used for communicating ideas and policy positions, like Medium or LinkedIn. Posting your piece on more than one channel can help amplify your organization’s impact and story.