



WRITING A STRONG OP-ED

A Practical Guide

WHY OP-EDS MATTER

Op-eds reach people outside our industry. They shape public understanding before decisions are made and give communities context they would not otherwise have. Editors look for authentic voices with firsthand experience, not technical experts writing policy briefs.

WHAT EDITORS ARE ACTUALLY LOOKING FOR

Editors publish people, not positions. Lived experience and local impact matter more than titles or perfect writing. A clear, focused message tied to the community is far more valuable than technical depth.

Editors value lived experience and local impact more than perfect writing.



OPEN STRONG

Begin with something that makes readers care right away:

- A recent event or decision,
- real-world risk,
- personal observation from your community.

EXPLAIN THE ISSUE

Briefly explain what is happening and why it matters. Assume the reader has no background knowledge. Avoid jargon and acronyms.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Explain how this issue affects your work, your family, or your town. This is what gives your op-ed credibility and makes it persuasive.

CLOSE WITH PURPOSE

End with a clear takeaway or call for awareness or action. Keep it focused and direct.

BEST PRACTICES

Do

- Write like you speak,
- Use short paragraphs,
- Keep the message simple,
- Make it local,
- Proofread before submitting.

Do Not

- Technical language or industry shorthand,
- Acronyms without explanation,
- Attack individuals,
- Cover multiple issues,
- Write for people who already understand the issue.

If your neighbor would not understand it, rewrite it.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR OP-ED

Start with your local or regional newspaper. Their website will usually have op-ed submission guidelines under the “Opinion” or “Op-Ed” section.

Send your submission

Paste the op-ed into the email body and include:

Your name
City and state
A brief identifier
(for example: railroad worker, community member)

Suggested subject line:

Op-Ed Submission: Railroad Safety and Our Community

HOW BRS CAN SUPPORT YOU

BRS can provide background materials, talking points, data, and editing support. If helpful, we can also prepare a draft for your review. Your voice and perspective are the most important part.

Be patient

Editors may edit for length or clarity or decline without explanation.
This is normal. A declined piece can often be submitted elsewhere.