

THE POWER OF THE PEN:

Tips for Writing a 350 Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Writing a What?!

An **op-ed** is a newspaper article that expresses an opinion about an issue in the news. The name comes from their usual location in the paper, opposite the editorial page. A letter to the editor is just that, a letter written to a newspaper by a reader in order to respond to a previous article or to offer an opinion. They are usually short and less than 150 words.

What do I write about?

Below are several suggested content ideas to include in an op-ed or letter to the editor for a local newspaper or media outlet.

These are meant to serve as a rough outline for a piece, but you should tailor the content to suit your local community and the audience of the outlet you're targeting.

General 350 Talking Points

(for more ideas see "How to Talk About 350," available at 350.org/action-media)

- » At a global level, our current rate of carbon emissions has created an unsustainable future for everyone.
- » Accelerating arctic warming and other early climate impacts have led scientists to conclude that we are already above the safe zone for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon Dioxide is a gas produced by burning fossil fuels that causes the atmosphere to retain heat. Current levels are 390 parts per million (ppm) and unless we are able to rapidly return to 350 ppm this century, we risk disastrous and irreversible impacts.
- » Propelled by the latest scientific evidence, many of the world's leading climate scientists have now revised the highest safe level of CO₂ to 350 parts per million.
- » For instance, Rajendra Pachauri, Nobel-prize winner and chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, recently endorsed 350 ppm, saying: "What is happening, and what is likely to happen, convinces me that the world must be really ambitious and very determined at moving toward a 350 target."

Include Local Details

[Include specific points on why this is an issue in your area, your group or your community. Include specific issues that will capture the interest of readers of the publication you are targeting.]

End with a Call to Action

- » 2009 is an absolutely critical year. This December, world leaders will meet in Copenhagen, Denmark to craft a new global treaty on cutting emissions at the United Nations Climate Change Conference.
- » However, the current plans for the treaty are much too weak to get us back to safety and 350. This treaty needs to put a high enough price on carbon that we stop using so much while still ensuring poor countries a fair chance to develop.
- » We need wide-ranging, diverse and vocal support from people all over the globe for 350 in order to convince world leaders that their climate treaty needs to be much more dramatic to be able to halt the dangerous emissions path we are currently on. On October 24th, more than 2000 communities in over 150 countries will join together for the international day of climate action to demand a climate treaty that sets us on a rapid course to 350.
- » [Finally, invite readers to take action in your area]

How to Write and Submit an Op-Ed:

Note: these guidelines may differ depending on the operation of your local outlet

- » Identify your target newspaper for an op-ed before beginning to write your piece, and consider their target audience when writing.
- » If possible, research whether or not the paper has published op-eds on a similar topic recently. If they have, and it's very similar to what you intend to write, your odds of placement are probably slim. If, however, a piece took a divergent view, this is also an opportunity to present an alternative perspective.
- » Many regional newspapers receive pieces with a national angle from news syndicates, so it's best to emphasize a local/regional angle with a piece you'd like to submit.
- » It's best to articulate the problem in the beginning, narrowing down to a very regional, granular point, and concluding with a clear call-to-action.
- » When deciding who should 'sign' the piece — it might not always be the same person that wrote it. Consider regional figureheads that are supporters to your issue and determine if it might be more advantageous to ask them to sign, or cosign, the piece once written.
- » The word count for op-eds vary depending on the outlet, so it's best to contact your target in advance to find out what their requirements are. Some word processing computer programs (like Microsoft Word or the free Open Office software) have built-in word count tools.
- » Most newspaper websites feature specifics on submitting, but usually require the signatory's name, mailing address and phone number for verification.
- » Once submitted, if you don't receive a response within 24-48 hours, it's usually best to contact the newspaper and speak to whoever oversees op-eds. If you call to follow up, be sure to relay the timeliness of the piece by emphasizing the 350 event happening in the community around the same time.

How to Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor:

Note: these guidelines may differ depending on the operation of your local outlet

- » While not necessary, if a story appears related to the issue, it's best to reply directly to the piece either pointing out an alternate perspective, or highlighting the strengths of the piece.
- » If there is no story to tie a letter to, connect the letter to a recent incident in the community, or to your 350 event.
- » Letters to the editor tend to be about 150 words, but it's best to keep them as short and succinct as possible.