

WRITING AND PITCHING OP-EDS

WHY EARNED MEDIA MATTERS

Earned media refers to coverage you don't pay for — attention you *earn* by being relevant, credible and compelling. It's different from owned media (like your website or blog) and paid media (like ads or sponsored content).

Op-eds fall into the earned media category. They are short opinion essays that allow you to:

- Share your expertise with a broad audience
- Shape public conversations on global health and development
- Position your organization and leaders as trusted voices

WHAT AN OP-ED IS (AND ISN'T)

An op-ed is a short essay that makes **one clear, persuasive argument** about an issue that matters to the public.

It is not:

- A press release announcing your new project or funding
- An academic article full of technical detail and citations
- A promotional piece about your organization's achievements

Instead, think of an op-ed as translating your expertise into an accessible, public-facing argument that resonates outside the sector.

WHEN AN OP-ED IS THE RIGHT CHOICE




Op-eds work best when:

- ✓ You want to highlight the public significance of an emerging issue (e.g., gender equity in humanitarian response).
- ✓ You have timely expertise and a unique perspective on a global debate in the news cycle.
- ✓ You can connect your sector work to a broader audience.
- ✓ You want to establish your voice as a thought leader.

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WHEN AN OP-ED IS THE WRONG CHOICE

Op-eds are **not** the right format when:

-  You are overtly promoting a project, initiative or event. Op-eds that could double as a paid advertisement will be discarded as fast as they're opened.
-  Your subject is too niche, technical or inward-facing without a clear public connection. If the argument cannot be quickly understood by someone outside your field — or if its significance isn't obvious to a general reader — editors are unlikely to see it as relevant for their audience.
-  Another format is a better fit, such as:
 - Blog posts for detailed project updates
 - Academic journals for peer-reviewed research contributions
 - Press releases for organizational announcements

WHAT MAKES A GOOD OP-ED TOPIC

The best topics are those that can be stated in one sentence, are easy to understand and are directly relevant to readers' lives.



A weak topic might be:

“Scaling innovations in health systems strengthening for LMICs.” (Too technical, too broad.)



A strong op-ed topic might be:

“Canada’s aid budget is shrinking — and women and children will pay the price.”
(Current/fiscal hook; frames urgency with a human lens.)

Pro Tip

If your main argument could double as the headline, you're on the right track!

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BEST PRACTICES IN OP-ED WRITING

Keep these essentials in mind:

- ✓ **One strong argument**, stated clearly at the beginning.
- ✓ **Conversational but authoritative tone.**
- ✓ **Evidence integrated naturally** (e.g., “According to the World Health Organization...” — not footnotes). You can add hyperlinks directly in the text to back up key claims for the editor’s benefit, but do not expect them to appear in the final publication.
- ✓ **No jargon.** Readers should be able to understand every term without looking it up. If your argument relies heavily on technical concepts, an op-ed is likely the wrong format.
- ✓ **A strong opening hook**, such as a short anecdote or surprising fact.
- ✓ **Concise writing.** Most Canadian publications prefer around 650 words, but consult the **submission guidelines** of the individual outlet you’re targeting to be sure (these can usually be found somewhere on the publication’s website).

BOOSTING YOUR CHANCES OF PUBLICATION

Competition for publication space is fierce. To stand out in a crowded inbox:

- ✓ Tie your argument to current events, emerging debates or days of observance. With so much competition, your op-ed needs to answer the question: **Why now?**

Pro Tip

Get creative making timely connections! Don’t feel limited to awareness days or big national headlines. There are other ways to make your piece feel urgent and relevant:

- **Seasonal or global patterns:** For example, an op-ed on access to education for girls in the global south could be tied to back-to-school season.
- **Policy cycles:** If your argument relates to Canada’s global commitments, you could connect it to a federal budget, global summit or international replenishment moment.
- **Crisis or humanitarian news:** A piece on maternal health services could be linked to coverage of an earthquake, conflict or refugee crisis, when women and children’s needs are in the spotlight.
- **Pop culture moments:** A new documentary about vaccine hesitancy, or a celebrity speaking about maternal health, can create space for your expertise.

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- ✓ Offer a unique angle or perspective not already covered.
- ✓ Submit accessible, well-written text. Even excellent ideas will be rejected if the writing is poor or overly technical.
- ✓ Recognize that timing matters. Even strong pieces may be declined if the outlet recently published something similar or has a full slate of coverage planned.

THE BYLINE

Every op-ed must be attributed to a person, usually with:




- Author's name, job title and organization
- Sometimes location or a short note on experience ("X has worked on maternal health programs in sub-Saharan Africa for 20 years")

Notes on bylines:


-  The most senior person connected to the piece usually gets the byline — unless a subject-matter expert is stronger.
-  Multiple authors are possible, but most outlets won't accept more than two or three.
-  Authors with existing public presence or publication history are more likely to be accepted.
-  The byline author doesn't have to submit the piece. Communications staff often handle submissions.


CHOOSING THE RIGHT TARGET PUBLICATION

Each outlet has its own audience, style and benefits. Here are a few to consider:

-  The Globe and Mail: national prestige, very selective
-  The Toronto Star: widely read across Canada, not limited to local issues
-  **Postmedia network:** a collection of over 100 individual publications across Canada (each with its own submission guidelines and requirements)
 - The network structure means that if your op-ed is picked up by any of these outlets, others within the network are allowed to republish it as well.

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 The Hill Times: political and policy audiences, influential in Ottawa

 Policy Options: suited for more policy-oriented and technical debates

 Independent regional papers: excellent for arguments with implications for a specific community

Remember

Bigger is not always better! The best choice depends on your goals and audience.

PITCHING YOUR OP-ED

Nearly all outlets publish their **submission guidelines** online, including word count, format and submission instructions (e.g., whether to add the op-ed as an attachment or include in the body of the email). Always check these before submitting.

Remember: Respect exclusivity rules! Editors will not accept op-eds published elsewhere, even on your own blog. If you haven't heard back, wait **at least three business days** before pitching to a different outlet. You will always be notified if your piece is being published.

A good pitch is short and focused. Typically, **two paragraphs** in an email is enough. Include:

- The main thesis of your op-ed
- Who the author is and why they are credible
- Why the argument matters *now*
- An acknowledgement of exclusivity
- Your gratitude for the editor's consideration!

If you have additional questions or would like specific advice related to this topic, please reach out communications@CanWaCH.ca.