

Should You Write an Op Ed?

An op-ed is a short essay that tells people how you feel on an issue that is important to you. Sometimes it is in response to an article that has run in the paper. But other times it is just an opportunity for you to talk in an informed way about what you care about. An op-ed traditionally goes in a newspaper. Legislators often read your daily newspaper to get a sense of how people feel about an issue, or a program.

In addition there are many other places now to do the same thing. The concept is the same, but using new media, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and sites to get the word out is also important.

So How Do I Write an Op-Ed or Guest Blog

It is not enough to write, "I like my school based health center." You have to tell them why the services help you and why having them is important to you and your peers. Your job is to convince people why your issue matters. And you have to hook them in the very first couple of sentences.

In a brief amount of words (no more than 700 for print) and about 400-500 for a blog post, you have to get the reader interested in your issue. Also identify yourself as a student, or a 15 year old who lives in Grand Rapids, right off the bat.

Before you start writing, take a little time to plan your message. And don't try to do too much in one essay. Pick one key point. Don't use initials or acronyms. Don't use your jargon.

If you are using facts and numbers, make sure they are right. You don't want people to discount what you have to say because you misused a number.

And take time to tell a little story. People like real life stories. It makes things real for them. So use more store and less statistics. What's your story? How did you get helped at your health center? Where would you go if you didn't go there? You get the picture.

And always come up with a recommendation. What do you want to see happen? Do you want more programs and funding? Do you want more places like this around the city? This is your time to make a case for what you want.

Always make sure your name, phone number, email (if you have one) and address are on your article before you send to an editor.