



How to Write a Newspaper Op-Ed

"Op-ed" sections in which writers can express viewpoints and/or respond to particular news events are found in nearly every newspaper, and can be particularly effective in raising awareness about issues and asking for public response. Op-eds are generally a short (600 – 750 words) article expressing an opinion or viewpoint on a timely news topic. The op-ed and "Letters to the Editor" sections are among the most widely read sections of a newspaper. Publication of an op-ed or letter assure that your views will reach many people.

State associations and individual providers should take every opportunity to educate and mobilize the public about problems with the Medicare bidding program by writing op-ed stories for the newspapers in their local bid areas that evoke emotions and share personal stories about the impact of the bidding program on patients and providers.

Here are some tips to help you get your op-ed piece or letter published:

- **The perfect news hook.** Editors need a reason why your viewpoint should be given attention right now and the issues facing the DME industry with competitive bidding fit that bill. You have no more than 10 seconds to hook the readers so put your main point on top.
- **The word limit.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 600 to 750 words will do for an op-ed, while a letter to the editor may be limited to 250 words. Check the paper's online opinion page to find out its submission guidelines.
- **Hook them, but get to the point.** Your first paragraph, and even the first sentence, should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument.
- **Make a single point—well.** With the limited space available, make one point clearly and persuasively. If you cannot explain your message in a sentence or two, you're trying to cover too much.
- **Use short sentences and paragraphs.** Make sure there's a space between each paragraph. Avoid complex sentences.
- **Avoid jargon and acronyms.** Simple language ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. Don't use acronyms or "policy wonk" language.

- **Tell readers why they should care.** Put yourself in the place of the busy person reading your story and ask yourself, “So what? Who cares?”
- **Use the active voice.** Active voice is always better than passive and is easier to read. Leave no doubt as to who is speaking.
- **Make it personal.** Illustrations, anecdotes, and personal stories help explain and bring complicated issues to life. Demonstrate how the bidding program has affected you, your patients, and your company.
- **Offer specific recommendations.** Op-eds are opinion pieces, not news stories. State your opinion on how to improve matters.
- **End with a bang.** Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph. If there is an “ask,” make it here.

Provide your contact information. List your name, address, phone, fax, and e-mail contact information at the bottom of the piece.

Submit your op-ed via e-mail, as a rule. Copy and paste the text of your op-ed into the body of an e-mail message. Don't send it as an attachment. Instructions for submitting an op-ed are usually on the opinion page of the paper's website.

Follow up. Most op-ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you haven't heard back from them by then, or if your piece is particularly time-sensitive, you can follow up with an e-mail message or phone call to ask if it was received and ask about its status.

A handy summary of the submission guidelines of the country's top 50 papers can be found at http://www.theopedproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=65.