

WRITE AN OP-ED SUPPORTING THE RIGHT TO READ

An Op-Ed is a short article targeting a specific problem and calling its audience to a specific action to address it. It can also be a statement of a position for or against something and the author's rationale for holding that position, in which case the "call to action" is for the reader to change the way they think of something. They can be placed in online or print newspapers, magazines, or other periodicals, which can be of national or local interest.

WHY WRITE AN OP-ED?

An op-ed is a chance to change someone's mind, raise awareness of an important issue, or call someone to action.

PLACING YOUR OP-ED

Consider whom you want to reach. To whom is this topic relevant? Who is in a position to do something about it? What is the publication that most closely targets this audience? Does it publish op-eds?

OP-ED VS. LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A letter to the editor responds directly to an article in a previous issue, adding context and either expressing support or offering a rebuttal. An op-ed can be about any current event or issue relevant to the target audience. It may be helpful to link to other articles in the publication, but it is not required.

THE ELEMENTS OF AN OP-ED

Note: Want to see examples of these steps? They are marked in a sample op-ed below, written by ABA's Advocate Associate Manager.

2. Outline the issue.

When did you start hearing about the bans or challenges that concern you? What do you think is problematic about them? Where are they occurring? What is the timeline for their impact?

2. Identify yourself.

Are you a store owner, bookseller, librarian, parent, or student? Do you have relevant expertise or experience regarding free expression, education, or literacy?

3. Offer your perspective.

Why do you think the book ban or challenge is inappropriate? Perhaps you think it is ideologically motivated, misunderstands the challenged material, violates the First Amendment, or is bad for society. Perhaps books like the ones being challenged were formative to you. Choose one approach and make the point as clearly as possible.

4. Concession.

A rhetorical concession is both a way to demonstrate good faith by engaging with an opposing view. It is also a chance to control the narrative and speak to misgivings your reader might have about your argument. It can also be used as a way to set up part of your own argument. For example, you might say, "I understand that some parents might be concerned about their children encountering inappropriate reading material at school. What these parents might not know is that every state and school district already has a review process and guidelines for teachers and librarians that work effectively."

5. Call to action.

The call to action is an intersection of two things: what needs to be done, and what can your reader do. Maybe there needs to be a societal change in how an issue is understood. In that case, your reader just needs to change their mind. Maybe a dangerous legislative ban has been introduced to the state legislature. In that case, your reader should call their congressperson. Maybe you are calling on a specific person (a judge, a governor, etc.) to use the power of their position to stop a ban from taking effect.

WHERE CAN I FIND EXAMPLES OF OP-EDS?

Here are three excellent ones:

- “[Don’t stand by as books are banned; stand up for libraries](#),” by Sara Jones. In the *Seattle Times*, Aug. 24, 2023. Sara is the Washington State Librarian and writes of the public role of the library and the recent challenges in Columbia County, OR.
- “[Op-Ed: Book Bans Are Just the Start of a Dangerous Trajectory for Texas](#),” by Kennedy Tackett. In the *Texas Signal*, June 6, 2023. Kennedy is a college freshman who details speaking at a school board meeting and the dangers of Texas HB 900.
- “[Op-Ed: Why inappropriate books are the best kind](#),” by David L. Ulin. In the *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 2022. David is a contributing writer to the Opinion page who writes of the particular, transformative value of “inappropriate” books.

You can also check out our sample op-ed, below.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out these resources from [The Op-Ed Project](#), which is dedicated to increasing the diversity of voices represented in op-ed pages.