

Op-Ed Tutorial
Katherine McKenzie MD

Op-Ed Structure

Lede around a news hook

Subject/argument/thesis

Expertise

Argument/first point (with evidence)

Argument/second point (with evidence)

Argument/third point (with evidence)

"Even so/to be sure"

Call to action or the "ask"/conclusion (circling back to the lede)

600-800 words. Embed links; don't use footnotes.

Other writing tips:

Generally speaking it's wise to avoid "be" verbs in sentences.

E.g.,

The door hinges are squeaky.

vs.

The door squeaks open.

(The latter is stronger and more vivid.)

Many writers do not like sentences to start with "I." You want the writing to be about the message and not about you yourself. Many academics also start sentences with "I think," which is very weak. It's better to make your statement boldly than to soften it by saying it's just what you think.

E.g.,

I think it's better to avoid "be" verbs when you write.

vs.

Strong writing avoids "be" verbs.

Pitching

Some pitching advice from Dr. Anna Reisman & Dr. Randi Hutter Epstein

1. Short: a few lines
2. Authority: why are *you* the person to write this
3. Why now: can you connect with something in the news (the “newshook”)
4. Style matters: show you can write; avoid jargon
5. Don’t lede with common knowledge: start with something surprising or attention-getting or personal
6. Research the outlet: if they’ve covered this angle recently, acknowledge it and tell how your version is different and fresh
7. Pitch one outlet at a time: Don’t get in the situation where you have to say, “sorry, I went with the ‘better’ outlet.”
8. Have a backup plan: Nudge after a few days, and have a plan of where to pitch next.
9. Don’t try to get the whole piece in the pitch: Lure them and they can read your attached piece
10. For general pieces: Think story, not topic
 - a. Menopause is a topic. A woman who has 20 hot flashes a day is a story.
 - b. Obesity is a topic. Someone trying to gain 10 pounds to qualify for gastric bypass surgery is a story, written by Tara Parker Pope for the NYT
11. Keep it focused: Think of a slice of a story
 - a. Masks is a big topic. How to keep your glasses from fogging up is a slice
12. Headline: If you can think of a catchy headline, it can lure the editor into reading the pitch.

Sample email pitches (establish credibility and briefly outline the essay):

Subject line (this is important):

Timely submission from Yale physician on

Initial pitch

Dear

I wanted to send you this piece that I think would be a good fit for [publication]. I am an internist and director of the Yale Center for Asylum Medicine. My piece argues that President Trump's immigration policies, noted most recently in a set of harsh proposals released yesterday, threaten some of our most cherished national ideals. Having treated over 100 torture victims in my clinic, I understand firsthand how these proposed changes endanger some of the world's most vulnerable people and betray American principles.

Would [publication] be interested in the following piece? I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
Kate McKenzie

(with email signature)

Follow up pitch (after a 5-7 days; may be sooner if topic is time-sensitive)

Hi XXXX,

I wanted to check in and see if you'd had a chance to read my piece. Does it seem like something you can use? I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
Kate McKenzie

If accepted, you may be asked for a bio and a headshot

Dr. Katherine McKenzie is on the faculty of Yale School of Medicine. She is the director of the Yale Center for Asylum Medicine.



Created with input from [The Op-Ed Project](#) and [Public Voices Fellowship](#) and Drs. Lydia Dugdale, Anna Reisman and Randi Hutter Epstein