

Writing Letters-to-the-Editor and Opinion Pieces

Letters-to-the-editor (LTE), commentaries, and op-eds can inform the public about the importance of science and scientific issues in everyday life. In addition, they are critical tools to help counteract the spread (intentional and unintentional) of inaccurate or misleading scientific information in traditional press outlets as well as through social media.

FASEB encourages efforts by individuals willing to submit op-ed's/LTE's to local and regional newspapers in response to increasing instances of the politicization of science and misrepresentation of scientific issues. Participation by scientists in the following states is especially critical:

Alabama	Kentucky	North Carolina
Alaska	Louisiana	Oklahoma
Arizona	Maine	South Carolina
Arkansas	Michigan	South Dakota
Colorado	Minnesota	Tennessee
Florida	Mississippi	Texas
Georgia	Montana	Virginia
Idaho	Nebraska	Wyoming
Iowa	New Hampshire	
Kansas	New Mexico	

We prepared the following resource to assist with writing and submitting LTE's/ op-ed's.

General Tips

- Be concise – summarize your position in the first sentence and be sure to cite the original article/story by name, date, and author
- Make it personal – share anecdotes or individual stories to show you have credibility on the subject
- Avoid jargon – spell out any name the first time you use it, followed by the acronym in parentheses
- Do not submit the same op-ed/LTE to multiple outlets – most newspapers require original submissions

Write Your Letter

Follow these steps to increase the chances of getting your submission published.

Step One: Determine Where to Publish/Who Is Your Audience

- Newspapers tend to prefer op-eds/LTEs that address local versus national issues (or national issues in a local context)
 - Submit to a regional or local news outlet versus a national paper
- Are you writing for the public? A member of Congress? State legislator/local official? Your neighbor?
 - Each audience requires a different approach

Step Two: Develop Core Message and Supporting Statements

- Identify the primary issue you want to address in your LTE/op-ed
 - What is the main point you want your reader to take away (one sentence)?
 - What two or three supporting points will appeal to/convince the reader?
- Relate your letter to a topic that has been in the news (e.g. coronavirus; vaccines; extreme weather)

Step Three: Make It Local

- Adjust your message to reflect the culture, language, and tone of your community
- Include information about research taking place in your community to localize science
- Be careful about making judgments about readers/members of the community
- Publish in newspapers that speak to supporters and opponents
- Submit a response to an editorial, op-ed, or front-page story within 2-3 days of publication

Step Four: Educate About the Scientific Process

- Help the reader understand key principles about science
- Explain what scientists do and what science means to people in their daily lives
- Show how data can drive decision making

Step Five: Get a Second (or Third!) Opinion

- Have someone else (including non-scientists) read your draft and offer comments or suggest edits

Submit Your Letter

- Select a newspaper (or other publication) for your LTE/op-ed. You can search the [official directory of U.S newspapers](#) by state and city
- Carefully review the directions for submitting an LTE or op-ed to the paper (Example: submit [an op-ed](#) or [an LTE](#) to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*)
 - Abide by publication guidelines and word limits. If no word limit is given, keep it to 250 words or less for LTEs and 750 words or less for op-eds
 - Submit your LTE/op-ed following the instructions provided
- Include your name, street address, email, and daytime phone number as the publication may contact you before printing your letter
- Spell correctly and pay close attention to grammar. Editors are more likely to select well-written letters that meet their guidelines
- If your letter is not published, do not give up. Many factors play a role into whether an LTE or op-ed is published. The editors may remember your efforts and publish your next submission

Sample Letters-to-the-Editor and Op-eds

- [Opinion: This Is Not the Time for A Chicken Pox Party](#) (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 2020) – Christine Curran, PhD, University of Northern Kentucky [[member of SBD RP](#)]
- [Commentary: A Grim COVID-19 Lesson. We're Paying A Steep Price for Not Investing in Science](#) (*The Chicago Tribune*, May 2020) – Marcelo Bonini, PhD, Northwestern University [[member of SfRBM](#)]
- [Opinion: Scared That Covid-19 Immunity Won't Last: Don't Be](#) (*The New York Times*, July 2020) – Akiko Iwasaki, PhD & Ruslan Medzhitov, PhD, Yale University [[members of AAI](#)]
- [How to Actually Talk to Anti-Maskers](#) (*The New York Times*, July 2020) – Charlie Warzel, opinion writer at large
- [Who Are You Calling Anti-Science?](#) (*Scientific American* Guest Blog, April 2017) – Troy Campbell, University of Oregon & Lauren Griffin, University of Florida
- [Opinion: If Our Masks Could Speak](#) (*The New York Times*, July 2020) – Thomas Friedman

Other Resources

- [Tips for Getting Your Science Out There](#) (*Nature* Career Column, January 2020) – Craig Cormick, Science Communicator
- [Communicating Science to Policymakers: Six Strategies for Success](#) (*Nature* Career Column, August 2019) – Hannah Safford & Austin Brown

Need further assistance? Contact Jennifer Zeitzer at jzeitzer@faseb.org or 301-634-7128