

WRITING OPINION EDITORIALS (OP-ED)

Members of Coalitions who are well-known for their expertise in mental health matters, and well-known people who have had personal experiences with mental illness, are the perfect candidates for writing op-ed pieces.

The op-ed gets its name from its position in most papers: on the page opposite the editorial page. It is not an “oppositional editorial.” Most papers do NOT want articles they obviously agree with. They are NOT letters to the editor, though the terms are often confused.

Op-eds are written on all subjects from a variety of subjects and topics. Sometimes they are written in reaction to the news of the day. Sometimes they are on new, fresh subjects.

The best way to write op-eds is to read op-eds. Read a sampler of op-eds from the paper you are targeting. Get a feeling for what the editor/s require/s.

Speak to the op-ed editor before sending the proposed op-ed. Find out what s/he is looking for requires. Talk to him/her after you send it.

Shoot for 600 words. Stop at 650. A long op-ed will either never be published or will be severely cut by an editor who may not share your concerns.

Competition for space is unbelievably tight. Organize your thoughts, gather your statistics and make your points as briefly as possible, just like writing a sound bite – only this one is 600 words long.

Write the op-ed very carefully and very well. Do not write by committee, but have the best writers on staff or in your organization proofread it. Use declarative sentences and tell the story directly and simply. Back up your points with facts.

Placement of an op-ed is significantly enhanced if it is written by people who are considered newsworthy or leaders in the community.

Whether sending the op-ed by mail or fax, include a short note explaining what your mental health coalition is and why it is submitting the piece. Express your willingness to work with the paper in editing the op-ed. Include the contact's name, address and phone number so the paper can contact the appropriate person. A day or so after submitting the op-ed, call the editor to see if it was received and to re-extend the offer to work with the paper (to help ensure its publication).