

Writing and Placing and Op-Ed

In addition to reporting the news, most newspapers publish a page of opinion columns and letters opposite the editorial page. Hence, the use of the term “opposite editorial,” or “op-ed.” Important ideas and issues are raised or debated on these op-ed pages – an ideal place to raise awareness of Red Ribbon Week.

Writing an op-ed puts you in the role of a columnist: expressing your views, while presenting the facts. Here are some tips for writing an op-ed:

- **Develop an outline.**
It will help you stay focused and act as a reminder to cover key points.
- **Express an opinion.**
Be direct about your point of view from the beginning of the piece.
- **Stick to one subject.**
Focus on a single theme to most effectively persuade the reader and drive home your point.
- **Keep it simple.**
Use short but compelling words to get the reader's attention. Most newspapers are written for readers at the fifth-grade level.
- **Provide background information.**
Do not assume your readers are aware of the issue. Be sure to paint a broad picture of the issue or problem.
- **Support your position.**
Statistics or study results add credibility – but don't bury your readers in numbers.
- **Use meaningful anecdotes.**
Reference a recent local or national news event or story, or a personal anecdote to bring your piece to life.
- **Localize it.**
Include local alcohol, tobacco, and other drug-related statistics.
- **Keep your op-ed to no more than 500 words.**
Be succinct – less is more.
- **Identify yourself.**
At the end of your op-ed, include, in italics, your full name, daytime telephone number, e mail address, and a brief description of who you are and what you do that makes you an expert on the subject.

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Writing and Placing an Op-Ed (cont.)

Submitting Your Op-Ed

When planning to submit an op-ed to a local publication, it's best to start early. About two months before Red Ribbon Week activities begin, call your local newspaper for the name of the appropriate editor to contact. Editors are often very busy, but try to take a few minutes of the editor's time to establish a rapport and explain the issue. You also can tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed during Red Ribbon Week in October, and ask about any newspaper-specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines) that you should follow.

Most newspapers designate a certain way they wish to receive op-ed submissions. They may prefer that you send it via U.S. mail, although many now accept submissions by e-mail and fax, as well. When you send your op-ed, include a cover letter that explains who you are and provides background information about Red Ribbon Week. It should be brief, explaining why your thoughts on the subject are important to the newspaper's readers. Allow the editorial staff about a week to review the piece, then place a follow-up telephone call to the editor to be sure the op-ed was received and to answer any questions.