

HOW TO Write an Op-Ed

ABOUT THE DANGERS OF FAKE CLINICS

What is an Op-Ed?

An op-ed (originally short for “*opposite the editorial page*”) is a written prose piece typically published by a newspaper or magazine that expresses the opinion of the author, someone who is usually not affiliated with the publication’s editorial board. (The editorial board is a group of people, usually at a publication, who dictate the tone and direction the publication’s editorial policy will take). Op-eds are different from both editorials (opinion pieces written by the publication’s editorial board members) and letters to the editor (opinion pieces submitted by readers, usually in response to specific, recently published articles or editorials).

General Guidelines*

All newspapers have guidelines for op-ed submissions that generally include a maximum word count (usually 600–750 words), exclusivity rules (requiring that an op-ed only be submitted to one paper at a time in the country or in a specific region), and instructions for how to submit the piece.

It is important to adhere to an outlet’s guidelines, *particularly exclusivity*. Failing to do so will likely cause your submission to be rejected, no matter how well-written it is. Many newspapers post guidelines on their websites. If not, call the editorial assistant or op-ed editor. While you have him or her on the phone, introduce yourself, share your idea, and ask if it would be a good fit for the paper

How Should I Structure My Op-Ed?

Try to include five sections in your essay, in this order:

ONE: THE LEDE

In journalism, the lede refers to the introductory section of a news story that is intended to entice the reader to read the full story. For your op-ed, the first couple of sentences are your lede. Make sure you make them want to continue reading.

- Present something that will grab the reader; something shocking that people don’t know.
- It should be provocative, but incontrovertible. Don’t exaggerate or use hyperbole.
- Make the reader recognize that this is important. Answer the reader’s question: *Why should I care about this?*
- Facts and figures. This is crucial, particularly when you aren’t writing a story that stems from your personal experience.
- Or, you might start with an expository story demonstrating the issue.

Did you know that here in New York City, there are more fake abortion clinics than real ones?

Every day in New York City, vulnerable women and girls are being misled about their healthcare options. And the local city law designed to protect them is not being sufficiently enforced.

Imagine you are young and worried you might be pregnant. Maybe you’re also living in poverty. Maybe you don’t have to imagine; maybe you’ve been there yourself. What’s the most important thing you need in this moment?

All throughout New York City and state, people are wearing white coats, posing as doctors and medical professionals, giving out false or misleading information.

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TWO: THESIS

Your “thesis” is your overarching argument. For example:

It is unacceptable for any woman or girl to be manipulated or lied to about her health or her body.

All women deserve comprehensive, medically accurate information about their bodies and their options, so they can make fully informed choices for themselves and their families.

All women and girls deserve the truth.

THREE: ARGUMENT

Your argument is a series of points to support your thesis. We recommend you make **three points**. As they say: good things come in threes. Your arguments can be:

- Personal story
- Testimonials from others about the tactics and consequences of fake clinics
- Statistics/data/facts. You can find a lot of information in this report from several years ago: <https://www.nirhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/cpcreport2010.pdf>
- Information about the requirements of New York City’s Local Law 17
- Damning quotes or content from fake clinics’ advertising and marketing materials
- Data about money/financial backing of fake clinics

NYC has taken action to protect its citizens against the deceptive practices of fake clinics. Local Law 17 of 2011 states that these so-called “crisis pregnancy centers” must have language stating that they are not licensed medical facilities in all written advertising (including online and social media), written disclosure signage in their clinics, oral disclosure in phone calls and in person, and privacy protection for their clients.

Fake clinics locate themselves in low-income neighborhoods so they can prey on more vulnerable women and girls who have fewer resources and fewer options.

Fake clinics may offer emotional support and resources to women and girls throughout a pregnancy, but they rarely if ever stay around after a child is born.

FOUR: PRE-EMPTION

Identify the strongest, most effective, most popular arguments against yours, and pre-empt them. This will be most effective when you come from a place of empathy and respect.

- Acknowledge & dismiss (“Some may say..., but...”)
- Validate & trump (“Yes, this is important, but something else is more important...”)
- Personal caveat (“Yes, I may be young, but I am old enough to know that...”)

Here in America, we cherish the First Amendment. Those who believe that abortion is wrong have the right to their views, and they have the right to share those views with others. An honest attempt to change hearts and minds is not wrong. But fake clinics are not honest. Just the opposite. No one has the right to mislead or lie to women.

Some of us may call ourselves “pro-choice,” and some may call ourselves “pro-life.” Reasonable people may disagree. But we should all be pro-truth.

Today, I am lucky enough to be able to access comprehensive quality medical care. But I can still remember what it felt like when I couldn’t; what it felt like when I had nowhere to turn. I would have believed anything from anyone who had a kind manner and a white coat.

You might think only a fool would fall for these scare tactics and lies. But put yourself in the shoes of a young woman who is scared and alone.

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FIVE: CONCLUSION/CALL TO ACTION/SOLUTION

Now that you have made your readers aware of the problem, make sure to tell them **what they can do about it**. Style tip here: Tie it back to the lede.

We don't know exactly how many fake clinics are operating in our city. They move around a lot and operate quietly. We need your help to identify them. Start with online research and phone calls, but don't be afraid to hit the streets. Fake clinics often "co-locate" near real healthcare clinics, so that's a good place to start.

Join our movement to identify fake clinics and ensure that they follow the law by reporting them to the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs. Here's how to report a complaint:

Don't let another woman or girl be taken in. Share this information with everyone you know, and download materials from the protruth website to distribute at schools and community organizations that serve women and girls in low-income neighborhoods.

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman (D., 27th Senate District) has introduced a bill in the State Senate that would make the requirements of New York City's Local Law 17 applicable in the entire state. Reach out to your state Senator and Assembly Member and urge them to support New York State Senate Bill S.102.

How Do I Get My Op-Ed Published?

"Pitch" your op-ed to your local newspapers. Most newspapers have an online portal to submit op-eds. Submit there, and then follow up with a direct email. If you don't see information online about how to submit an op-ed, call the editorial assistant or op-ed editor and ask about the process for submitting.

*Adapted in part from the www.NCJW.org website.