Writing Op-Ed Pieces

An op-ed is a great communications tool when you need more than a sound bite. It is persuasive writing at its best. Begin by essentially stating your conclusion first. Make your strongest point up front, and then spend the rest of your piece making your case. This is often called “back-filling” with the facts.

When creating your message, you should answer the following:

- What is the one thing people need to know?
- What reason makes this important?
- It is important to act now because…

Use this checklist to keep your op-ed piece on track:

- Focus tightly on one issue or idea in your first paragraph. Be brief.
- Express your opinion and then base it on factual, researched or first-hand information.
- Be timely, controversial, but not outrageous. Be the voice of reason.
- Be personal and conversational; it can help you make your point.
- Be humorous, provided that your topic lends itself to humor.
- Have a clear editorial viewpoint – come down hard on one side of the issue. Do not equivocate.
- Provide insight and understanding; educate your reader without being preachy.
- Near the end, clearly re-state your position and issue a call to action. Do not philosophize.
- Be passionate and use the "fire in your gut" to accompany your logical analysis.
- Do not ramble or let your op-ed unfold slowly.
- Use clear, powerful, direct language.
- Emphasize active verbs; forget the adjectives and adverbs, which only weaken writing.
- Avoid clichés, jargon, and acronyms unknown to the average reader.
- Appeal to the average reader. Clarity is paramount.
- Check the publication’s website for guidelines for submitting opinion pieces. Typically, there is a 500-750 double-spaced word limit.
- Include a brief bio, along with your phone number, email address, and mailing address at the bottom.

Done properly, the op-ed piece will help ACPA gain respect, win converts or garner high-quality publicity for the industry, all the while reaching the elite audience of opinion-makers who regularly read the op-ed pages

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