

Op-ed Guidelines

Op-eds get their names from their placement in the newspaper; they are opinion pieces written by members of the public that typically are published on the newspaper's editorial page. Newspapers, magazines and other news publications regularly run op-eds to ensure that they present a diversity of opinions on topics of importance to their readers. Since they are longer than letters to the editor, they offer an opportunity for a better-developed argument.

The Office of Public Information can help outline an op-ed, review it and/or give additional ideas and approaches in drafting an opinion piece. We also can assist in submitting the op-ed or suggest the best outlets for submission.

Good op-eds require:

- Strong opinions articulately stated.
- Timely topics. News gets stale quickly; so don't give opinions if they're simply a rehashing of what already has been said.
- Brevity. Publications that carry op-eds have standard word limits; know them, and keep them in mind when writing.
- Expertise. Write about a subject based on a particular expertise, either because of a scholarly background or personal experience.
- Focus. Choose a topic and stick to it, rather than diluting one's own argument by simultaneously tackling more than one subject.
- A call to action. This requires that the arguments outlined in the op-ed come to a logical conclusion – and that a solution is presented. Do not simply outline a problem.

General writing tips for op-eds related to Minot State University:

- Get to your point for writing quickly. Most op-eds range from approximately 700 to 1,200 words; caution should be taken in not using too many words to “set up” the argument. Enough space should be reserved to provide examples or evidence of your opinion, expertise or topic.
- Connect the topic to the readership of the publication; tell local readers why they should pay attention.
 - Why would they care to know this about Minot State University?
 - Why should they know more about this topic? (Perhaps it's an expansion or more in-depth information about a story that has already been covered in the newspaper.)
- Consider using a short list – Here are three reasons the proposal should be defeated or here are four possible solutions that won't cost the taxpayers a nickel – to help articulate the major points in a way that is accessible to the readers.
- Write with the readers in mind. Tailor the style – academic, breezy, thoughtful, and humorous – to the publication's audience.
- Back up the arguments with facts – and be sure to confirm those facts before they are used. Don't use footnotes, but attribute figures to their sources when using them: Figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that or Data from the 2000 Census clearly show that ...
- Convictions should be firm. If the author is refuting arguments from an opposing side that are common knowledge, be sure to use more space arguing the point than articulating that held by others.
- Be precise in grammar, spelling, sentence construction and other essentials of composition. Lack of attention to these aspects of the work reflects poorly on the author as a legitimate source of information.

It's also important to remember that once an op-ed is published, be certain to take advantage of its publication. Distribute copies of it or e-mail it to others who may find it useful. Please let the public information office know about it, so that it can be included in materials that PIO disseminates.