

# CERA 2012

## Communicating Research and Information for Results

### Tips for Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

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#### Op-eds

Stick to the word limit: Op-ed pieces are generally 500-750 words long. Learn the limit at the paper you're submitting to and don't run over. Your credibility and chances of getting read are higher if you know and follow the paper's guidelines.

Stick to one subject: There may be many related subjects, but focus on your key point.

State your position at the beginning of the article, don't make people search for your point.

One of the basic mistakes in opinion piece writing is to save the point of the piece for the end, for a "big finish." This is called "burying the lead."

State your thesis and then present the supporting information—data, anecdotes, observations. These are what makes your op-ed more attractive than many: You have actual facts to support your thesis.

Use short, declarative sentences. If you see a lot of commas, you can probably exchange some of them for periods and break a complex sentence up into several simple ones.

Keep paragraphs short. It is easier for readers if their eye doesn't have to decode long sections of small type.

Have a good last line. It's your final chance to drive your point home. End with a bang, not a whimper.

Don't use footnotes or cite references. Attribution to other authors may be done in the body of the text, but without the formalities of academic writing.

Don't submit the same piece to different papers at the same time

Don't use terminology or jargon. Your audience is intelligent, but may not carry a PhD in your area of focus.

#### Letters to the Editor

The topics of letters to the editor must relate to a story already run in the paper.

Typical letters to the editor may be as short as 50 words and may run up to 200 words: check the editorial guidelines of the newspaper, easily found on a paper's web site.

As with op-eds, you should pick only one topic, keep the letter short and to the point, and don't veer off topic.