

OUTLINE FOR AN OP-ED (to review before you write)

Lede—your first sentence or couple of sentences. This is where you draw readers in. A good lede offers enough explanation to ground them, and something a bit fresh and intriguing.

Nut graf—this is the second or third paragraph, and it is where you preview your argument. The heart of the piece should be here: your first crack at the main thing you want to say.

Evidence—much of the body of the piece should consist of evidence supporting your thesis. Without this, an op-ed is merely a polemic (and unlikely to move anyone who doesn't already agree with you, I'd argue).

Caveat—this is often a paragraph that begins with a phrase like “to be sure.” It's where you acknowledge the best evidence or argument against you, and grapple with it.

A thought and a half—a really good op-ed makes a strong argument, and then has a twist at the end, often an additional related point of interest. In particular, you may want to put thought into reaching an audience that doesn't necessarily agree with all your premises (ie that's more conservative than you are, or more liberal).

Conclusion—Following your bonus interesting second point, you want to drive home your main argument without simply repeating it. This is often the job of the second to last paragraph.

Kicker—you want to end memorably. Usually, a short sentence works best. Cliches are especially tempting here but to be avoided, or at least riffed on.