



Earned Media Guide

Earned media is favorable publicity gained through promotional efforts. It can be one of the most powerful advocacy tools at your disposal. Unlike paid advertising, earned media coverage often carries more weight and credibility in the minds of consumers because the information is delivered through the recognized filter of a credible third-party organization such as a newspaper, TV, or radio station.

Earned media is called *earned* for a reason. Just because you submit a letter or an article does not mean that it will be published. There is limited space in a paper's opinion column so competition is stiff for letters to the editor or op-eds.

You want to ensure that your piece has a good chance at getting published, so here are some general strategies for ensuring that your letter or op-ed is run:

- 1. Track the news and jump at opportunities.** Timing is essential. If there is a news item that directly concerns your issue or will allow you to highlight issue, prepare your earned media piece as soon as possible. The likelihood of your piece running decreases the more time that passes between the news event and your submission.
- 2. Follow the paper's guidelines for submission.** Every paper has its own guidelines regarding letters and op-eds. If your article does not conform to the guidelines it is likely that it will not be run. Follow length specifications exactly.
- 3. Put your main point on top.** You have no more than 10 seconds to hook a reader. One of the most common mistakes newcomers make is using too much wind-up before throwing the pitch. Do your best at convincing the reader that it is worth his or her valuable time to continue right at the start.
- 4. Tell readers why they should care.** Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your article. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask out loud: "So what? Who cares?" You need to answer these questions.



5. **Make a single point.** Attempting to address multiple issues can detract from the effectiveness of your article. Be satisfied with making a single point clearly and persuasively.
6. **Offer specific recommendations.** An op-ed article is not a news story that simply describes a situation; it is your opinion about how to improve matters. Be as specific as possible.
7. **Offer examples.** One detail or illustration is better than hundreds of words of exposition. Use examples, and then use more examples—ones that readers can understand and care about. Is a government program wasteful? Describe an incident in which 250 of the reader's tax dollars were squandered. That is far more memorable and meaningful to the individual than a concept like "\$356 million was lost last year."
8. **Don't be afraid of the personal voice.** As an advocate, it may feel impossible to share about the work you do due to our shared ethics and policies around confidentiality. However, as long as no personal identifying information is shared, it is possible to talk about the vital work you do to end violence for all. For example, you could focus on your experiences as an agent of change, or detail what an honor it is to witness the successes of program participants.
9. **Avoid tedious rebuttals.** If you have written your article in response to an earlier piece that made your blood boil, avoid the temptation to prepare a point-by-point rebuttal. It can make you look petty and it is a safe bet that many readers did not see the earlier article. If they did, they have probably forgotten it. Mention the earlier article once and then argue your own case.
10. **Make your ending a winner.** Most authors recognize the value of a strong opening paragraph that hooks readers, but when writing for the op-ed page, it also is important to summarize your argument in a strong final paragraph. Many casual readers scan the headline, skim the opening column, and then read only the final paragraph and byline. One literary device that often works well is to reprise a phrase or thought delivered at the beginning, thus closing the circle.