



WRITING OP-EDS AND LETTERS

Why write an op-ed?

- Raise awareness about an issue; such as Access to Education
- Call attention to the Global Campaign for Education or any other effort you and your peers are undertaking to address an issue
- Convince people to take action—use writing is an advocacy tool
- Reach broader audience;
- See your name in print

The **bottom line**: writing can be a powerful advocacy tool. It can help you reach many people by making your case with clarity and conviction.

All of your op-eds and letters should center around the theme of fighting global poverty. Whether the issue is education, health or hunger—you are always going to come back to this idea.

Essential questions to ask yourself before starting your op-ed:

- **Why now?** Why is this story important at this point in time?
 - All op-eds must be timely.
 - In most cases, you should be writing with the frame of an event (either in anticipation or afterwards), but your op-eds can center around campaigns or fundraising, depending on what you are organizing.
- **Why me?** Why am I the person that should be addressing this issue?
 - For every possible issue, there is a range of people who can present their opinion. Your job is to convince the editor that your voice is worth hearing. The best way to do this is to show what you're doing and why your point of view is relevant.
 - You will most often be offering a unique perspective by writing as an American high school student who is part of a movement of young people fighting poverty.

Now you're ready to start planning your op-ed. Here are your key ingredients:

1. First, you need a **frame**. Ask yourself: what is the broader issue I'm addressing?
 - I.E.: We need to do more to achieve universal access to education
2. Then, you need **evidence**:
 - Statistics help, but remember to relate them to a scale your readers will understand. Give them perspective.
 - IE: 90 million children are out of school; What does that mean?
 - Make it local: that's approximately 3 times the population of the state of California, the most populous US State.
 - Use ratios: More than one in every six children worldwide are denied the right to basic primary education. At my high school of 1000 people, it would be exactly 167 people that are not able to attend school.



- *Note:* It's very important that your statistics are accurate. Don't just go to any website and pluck a whole bunch of numbers—use reliable sources & always cross-check. (We suggest the Global Campaign for Education website for access to education).
3. Now, it's time to say **what you're doing** to address the issue:
- It could be organizing a fundraising drive, holding a vigil or spearheading a letter-writing campaign. What matters is that you show that you are taking action and that youth nationwide are as well.
 - Don't forget to link what you are doing with NetAid nationwide.
 - Fellow NetAid Leaders give your mission a national scope—they shows that your actions are part of a broader coalition.
4. Tell other people **what they can do**:
- You have all lots of readers at your fingertips. You've made the case the issue is important and proved it. Now empower them to take action: tell them how they can act.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Tone**
Keep the overall message challenging but positive. You do not want people coming away thinking there is no hope or that they haven't done enough. You want them to think that there's work to do and that they can help.
- **"We" beats the "I"**
Try to speak in the "we" form instead of the "I" form. Why? You don't want this piece to be all about you. You want it to be about a broader group—people in your school and community—who are working together in a campaign.
- When writing editorials, **you never have to say, "I think..."**
It is an opinion piece—that's taken for granted. You always want to speak with authority.
IE: too soft: We think universal access to education can be achieved in our generation.
 Better: We can achieve universal access to education in our lifetime; all we need is the will.
- Writing op-eds requires **advance planning**.
Most of your op-eds will be framed around global events such the Global Campaign for Education's Action Week, which means they are time-sensitive. You'll have to plan in advance.

How to write letters:

- First, you have to read your paper regularly to find issues to respond to. Letters can respond to an article or an op-ed.
- You must respond within a few days of the article; otherwise your letter will be outdated.



- Often times, the articles that inspire you to write letters will be filled with things you disagree with. In a letter you should choose only ONE and make a clear case for why you disagree.
 - Avoid the temptation to try and do too much; the letters that are most often published are ones that are concise and straightforward
 - Letters are very short, usually around 200-250 words. That's no more than a couple of short paragraphs.

- **Letter structure:**
 - State—very concisely—what the article says that you disagree with. Be careful not to waste precious space summarizing the article you're responding to.
 - Explain why you disagree with this point. Provide one example that supports your point of view. Again, this should come from personal experience if possible.