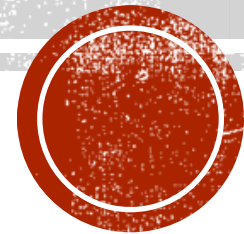


WRITE NOW FOR PUBLIC AUDIENCES

Teresa Mangum and Jessica Welburn
Obermann Center for Advanced Studies
Get It Done Series 2018



How thought leaders rise:

Ideas

Op-ed & other
"front door" idea
forums

Social Media
(viral sharing)

Blog mentions

Expert Citations

Credibility

Radio/TV
appearances

Book Deals

Speaking
Opportunities

Exposure

Funding

Fellowships

Policy
Consulting
Invitations

Leadership
Positions

Influence

→ *Ability to change the world*



WHEN? WHY?

- Your research offers a unique perspective on a current issue
- You see a possible policy implication that your research supports
- Discussions of a current issue take an either/or position—your work suggests ignored gray areas, ignored questions, or overlooked steps or solutions
- A major holiday, commemoration, or community event offers a perfect lead in
- You have genuine questions about an issue and want to open a conversation
- NOTE—The point is not necessarily to say **HERE'S WHAT I KNOW**. Instead, use your expertise as a lens (not a hammer)



HOW?

- **Timing**—link your idea to current event
- **Length**—no more than 750 words TOPS
- **Focus**—choose ONE point you want to focus on and make it in ONE sentence
- **Purpose**—what do you want piece to accomplish?



STRUCTURE 1

- What is the problem? Assert the issue right up front (your lede)
- Why hasn't it been solved? Know the history
- Use a hook—current event or topic in the news
- Use no more than 3 subpoints or approaches to your main point
- Consider grounding your claims in a single vivid, striking example
- Keep the question “SO WHAT?” in view for every sentence
- Use clear, specific statistics and figures
- Acknowledge limitations and costs
- End with a proposal or solution



STRUCTURE 2 (OP ED PROJECT ADVICE)

- Lede
- Thesis
- Own your expertise
- Argument
 - 1st point
 - Evidence
 - Evidence
 - Conclusion
- Repeat 2nd and 3rd point
- To be sure paragraph
- Conclusion—loop back to opening lede and offer a solution



TONE

- Remember to balance argument and affect
- Connect with readers *authentically*
- Don't complain, explain
- Use short sentences. Seriously. Short Sentences
- Use active, vivid, action VERBS—let them do the work for you
- Avoid language unfamiliar to general readers
- Show respect for alternative opinions
- Assume you only know part of the story—be **humble**



IMAGINE YOUR READERS

- Why should I trust this guy?
- Can she back up what she says?
- Same old, same old or something new?
- So what?
- Does this writer genuinely care about the issue? The affected community?
- Does the piece offer me a new way to see, approach, or solve a problem?



PITCH YOUR PIECE— OP ED PROJECT ADVICE

- **Why now?** Why is this newsworthy, at this moment?
- **So what?** Why should people care?
- **Why me?** Why am I the best one to write this piece?

An email pitch should include:

1. The upcoming news peg – and any upcoming alternate news pegs
2. Your idea in a few lines
3. Your credentials – only those that are relevant
4. The finished piece pasted below your pitch
5. Your contact information



VENUES

- Chronicle of Higher Education
- Conversation
- Des Moines Register
- Huffington Post
- Inside Higher Ed
- Medium
- New York Times (good luck)
- Note—lots of large newspapers have blog sites that publish opinion pieces



SOURCES AND RESOURCES

- [Op Ed Project](#)
- [University of Massachusetts Public Engagement Project](#)
- M. V. Lee Badger. *The Public Professor: How to Use Your Research to Change the World*. New York University Press, 2016.
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- Amy Schalet. [“Should Writing for the Public Count for Tenure?”](#) *THE CONVERSATION*. August 18, 2016.
- Arlene Stein and Jesse Daniels. *Going Public: A Guide for Social Scientists*. U Chicago Press, 2017
- Bret Stephens. [“Tips for Aspiring Op-Ed Writers.”](#) *New York Times*. August 25, 2017.

