WRITE NOW
FOR PUBLIC AUDIENCES

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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**

- **Exposure**
  - Radio/TV appearances
  - Book Deals
  - Speaking Opportunities

- **Influence**
  - Funding
  - Fellowships
  - Policy Consulting Invitations
  - Leadership Positions

→ Ability to change the world

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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
    - 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**