

DEEP POVERTY INITIATIVE

Op-ed Action Guide



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The following suggestions, taken from experts in media communications, should be used as guidelines for crafting your own op-ed. In addition, links to already published op-eds follows these suggestions to provide examples of successful op-eds on the topics of poverty and deep poverty.

As you craft your own op-ed around deep poverty, please ensure that your message includes your voice so that the piece is not only authentic to you and your concerns, but so that it is clear to readers that you have written your own piece rather than appropriated a template.

Addressing deep poverty will take lifting all of your voices, so although we recognize this may take some time to craft an authentic op-ed, we believe in the power of psychologists using op-eds to bring attention to addressing deep poverty.

- **Have a hook.**

News outlets are much more likely to accept a piece about a topic that's in the news. Readers want your perspective on something they're already reading about, so try to tie your topic to something already in the public eye.

- **Tailor your op-ed to the news outlet's audience.**

If you're submitting to a local newspaper, they're typically looking for op-eds that are specifically relevant to their community, so include examples related to local influences on or consequences of the issue. You can also emphasize your personal connections – many op-ed editors prefer authors who live locally or who have other local connections.

- **Consider a range of outlets and read the publications you want to write for.**

We all want to publish in *The New York Times*, but consider a range of outlets and get familiar with where you'll submit your op-ed. Outlets like *Psychology Today* and *HuffPost* are always looking for content, as are smaller, local papers. At the same time, different publications have different expectations. Read the platform to which you're submitting to get a sense of style, length and level. Most newspapers have op-ed word limits of around 600-750 words, so you'll have to be concise.

- **Write simply and don't use jargon.**

Make a simple point clearly and concisely. Use short sentences and paragraphs. And don't use

jargon! Think about how you would reach your parents, grandparents, or next-door neighbor. Ask a nonacademic friend to critique your draft and make sure it is free of confusing language.

- **Lead with your conclusion and finish strong.**
In academia, scientists lay out the groundwork that supports their ideas before they articulate their conclusions. But in an op-ed, that order is reversed. Start with a key finding and then unpack it for readers. You have to grab readers' attention from the get-go and convince them that you have something to say. Many casual readers scan the headline, skim the opening and then read the final paragraph and byline, so summarize your argument in a strong final paragraph.
- **Tell stories and go light on the data.**
Numbers and statistic are ok, in moderation, but stories capture readers' attention – we remember narratives and colorful details more than facts and figures. Bring your examples to life. Include vivid detail—what something smelled like, looked like, felt like. Embrace personal experiences. Active voice is nearly always better than passive voice. And remember: you're not writing an academic article.
- **Tell readers why they should care. Offer specific recommendations.**
Put yourself in the place of a busy person looking at your article. Ask aloud: "So what? Who cares?" You need to answer these questions. If you describe a problem, propose a solution. Don't be satisfied with analysis. How should your town help those in deep poverty?
- **Make it exclusive.**
Don't submit your op-ed to multiple outlets simultaneously, thinking that this will increase your chances of getting it published. Most newspapers insist on exclusivity. If you don't hear back from an editor within a week of submitting, follow up with an email asking if a decision has been made because you'd like to submit the piece elsewhere. And don't get discouraged – it's perfectly normal to have to submit to more than one outlet.
- **Include your contact information and affiliations.**
At the end of your letter, include your personal information (title, university or other affiliation, means of contact, physical address).
- **Make your voice heard.**
If your op-ed is published, consider sending a copy to your legislator and/or other affected parties in your state. Let APA know!

Example Op-eds for Deep Poverty (Specifically)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/opinion/poverty-united-states.html>

<https://www.phillymag.com/citifed/2015/10/09/how-to-fight-poverty/>

Example Op-eds for Poverty (Generally)

<https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/poverty-pennsylvania-malcolm-kenyatta-vincent-hughes-20190626.html>

<https://nsadvocate.org/2017/11/24/op-ed-child-poverty-is-felt-in-our-province-and-its-time-for-change/>

<https://www.rcnky.com/articles/2017/06/20/op-ed-childhood-poverty-community-crisis>

<https://www.dailypress.com/opinion/dp-edt-oped-kast-0610-story.html>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2018/04/30/true-cost-2018-poverty-level-louisville-kentucky/564171002/>

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