How to Submit an Opinion Column

Daily newspapers, large and small, welcome submissions of guest commentaries. Most receive several dozen unsolicited guest commentaries every week and have spots for only a few so make sure you’re proud of what you are submitting.

To be seriously considered, you should submit a strong opinion piece and make sure you review the website for submission specifications. Some papers only print columns between 550 and 650 words, whereas others will accept up to 750 words. Make sure you check with the specific publication to make sure you are meeting their specifications. The best way to locate that information is on their website on the “contact” page.

Guest columns are for making arguments about pending issues of public policy and commenting on issues in the news. Most papers give highest priority to local writers writing about local topics.

Tips on Writing and Submitting

**DO** state your opinion forcefully. Use punchy, colorful language.

**DO** have a powerful lead and prove your case throughout the column.

**DO** be timely. Editorial pages prefer articles about events that are in the news today.

**DO** be patient and unafraid to check in about whether or not your piece is being considered.

**DO** include a sentence or two of biographical information about the writer.

**DO** use common English. (For example, don’t talk about “scraping the cap” without explaining in layman’s terms what it means)

*On exclusivity:* Some newspapers demand exclusivity on op-eds they publish. It is more common for the larger state papers to require your piece be offered to them exclusively. If you are planning to submit to multiple publications, it’s a good idea to give each paper one week to consider the piece. Review each newspaper’s guidelines.
How to Send

Op-eds and letters are generally submitted via email. Most newspapers will include the email contacts for editorials on their opinion pages or “About Us” / “Contact Us” pages on the web. The opinion piece should be emailed individually to the opinion page editor. If you need contact information for a particular outlet, call the main line or news desk OR contact the Alliance communications department.

Example email:

To: Timothy White <email>

Subject: Guest op-ed submission

Dear Mr. White,

I’m submitting this guest column for your consideration [include: on behalf of <name> if you are submitting on someone’s behalf]. The anniversary of Social Security is next Tuesday, Aug 14th. Thank you for taking a look. Kindly let me know if you plan on running it or I will follow up with you.

Thank you very much,

<name>

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Social Security at 77: What Does the Future Hold?

By: Jim Moore, President of the North Carolina Alliance for Retired Americans

<<<Column of appropriate length pasted in text of email, not attached>>>

[Footer with information about the author]

Jim Moore is the president of the North Carolina Alliance for Retired Americans. With over 63,000 members, the North Carolina Alliance works to advance public policy that protects the health and economic security of older Americans by engaging seniors to make a difference through activism.

Note: if your column is being seriously considered, you may receive a request for a headshot of the author.
How to Follow Up

You can follow up by calling the news outlet and asking for the opinion page editor. The simple act of a phone call will set you apart and draw attention to your column that may have otherwise been overlooked. Do not call after 3 pm, though.

Sample script [be very brief!]:

“Hi my name is <__>. How are you doing? I’m calling to follow up on an opinion piece I submitted <today, yesterday, late last week> about <topic>. I wanted to know if you were considering running it.”

If you didn’t get an email response, you may get a Yes/No answer this way. You can then watch for your column or to submit it elsewhere.