



## WRITING AN OP-ED (opinion editorial)

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- The best op-eds use a personal story to help the reader understand a systemic policy issue.
- Open with a strong narrative that gets the reader's attention. Close your piece with a specific call to action that emphasizes the importance of the issue, and names the decision-makers responsible.
- Op-Eds are between 500 and 800 words. Each newspaper usually states its specific requirements.
- Include your contact information.

### WRITING PROMPTS

**Why is this issue important to you?**

**What are 2-3 key points you want readers to know about the issue? What data support these points?**

*Point 1:*

*Supporting Data:*

*Point 2:*

*Supporting Data:*

*Point 3:*

*Supporting Data:*

**What is your call to action? Who is the local decision-maker with the power to enact your solution?**

**OP-ED EXAMPLE:****Early Head Start Provides Essential Support**

*The potential of every baby born in Montana is limitless. A child's brain develops at a rate faster than any other stage of life during the first three years of life, forming more than a million connections per second that serve as the foundation for all subsequent development and learning. However the first life experiences of babies in our state is many times a much sadder story. Babies are more likely than any other age group to be poor, living in families that don't have enough money to cover their basic needs. Many times these babies are experiencing environmental chaos, food insecurity, unstable housing, and chronic stress that hinders development.*

*Poverty can cause stress that lasts a lifetime. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to have learning disabilities and developmental delays, lag behind in later reading proficiency, and develop language delays. They are more likely to have a lower earning capacity and fewer hours worked as adults, as well as, a higher risk of obesity and other negative health outcome. Fortunately, there are many programs such as Early Head Start that are available to these young children to help support a healthy start even when faced with poverty.*

*[insert a local example/story]*

*The Early Head Start program in the United States caters to low-income infants, toddlers, and their families as well as pregnant women by providing comprehensive services. Communities customize the program to meet the needs of local children and families by providing high-quality infant and toddler care and/or home visits. To address the complex risks posed by poverty, Early Head Start programs also provide a wide range of services, including nutrition, health and mental health, and family support services.*

*Early Head Start has been shown to have positive effects in research. The enrolled children have demonstrated improved cognitive and linguistic development, as well as, a decrease in aggressive behavior. Parents' employment and participation in education and training were also encouraged by Early Head Start enrollment, which found that families were also more emotionally supportive, supported children's language development, and were less likely to use harsh punishment such as spanking.*

*However, access to this essential program is far from sufficient. Early Head Start was only available to 7% of eligible children nationwide prior to COVID. Early Head Start services are even more in demand right now. Congress should make it easier for more people to access Early Head Start, a program that helps people who are struggling with poverty. All babies and toddlers deserve the support and quality early experiences Early Head Start provides*

*[Name, title, and organization (if applicable) of the author]*