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**Writing an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor**

The op-ed section of a newspaper provides a forum for readers to express their opinions. An op-ed can be authored by a prominent member of your organization/campaign, an expert or an elected official. If you don't have access to anyone on that level, consider asking a parent whose children participate in the program, a teacher or a site worker.

The more well known an author, the easier it will be to place the op-ed. To place an op-ed, check the instructions on the newspaper's website and follow them precisely. Most op-ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you do not hear back, or if your request is urgent, you can make a follow-up call to confirm its receipt and ask about its status.

As for format, the op-ed should be double-spaced with wide margins. Provide your name, address, phone, fax and email contact information at the top of the page. A template op-ed is provided to get you started. Should you wish to expand on it or write your own, please keep these tips in mind:

* Submit your op-ed at least three weeks to a month before you would like it to run.
* Make it timely.
* Use data. Current statistics and reports will give your op-ed more credibility.
* Keep it brief. Check submission guidelines; generally, up to 750 words is acceptable.
* Make one point. Space is tight; make one argument clearly and persuasively.
* Avoid jargon. Keep it simple, no acronyms or technical language.
* Use examples. Try to bring the piece to life with a true story.
* Make a specific recommendation. You're the expert. Show how the situation can be improved.
* Create a strong lead. A well-crafted first paragraph is essential to get the reader through the piece.
* Give readers information on how to learn more. A website or phone number is helpful.
* End strong. Summarize your argument memorably.

**Writing and Placing a Letter to the Editor**

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are among the most popular sections of a newspaper and are typically in response to articles and news coverage, either in support of, or to correct or clarify the way the issue was covered. An LTE is also a great way to share what you are doing to help end childhood hunger. To increase your chances of getting published, try to meet the simple criteria many editors look for:

* Keep it local and tie it to an event. The "event" could be National School Breakfast Week.
* Keep the message of your letter clear: Kids are going hungry, but they don't have to be.
* Keep the peace. Do not point fingers or use exclamation points.
* Keep it short. Again, check the paper's guidelines. One tight paragraph is best, about 150 to 200 words. If you need more space, consider writing an op-ed where the length can be as high as 750 words.
* Include your name, address, email and daytime phone number in your letter. Instructions for submitting an LTE are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's website.
* Follow up. Wait a few days and then call. If you haven't heard anything within a week, call again to check on the letter's status.