



# Truman National Security Project

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## **Media Packet – The Basics**

### **This Packet Includes:**

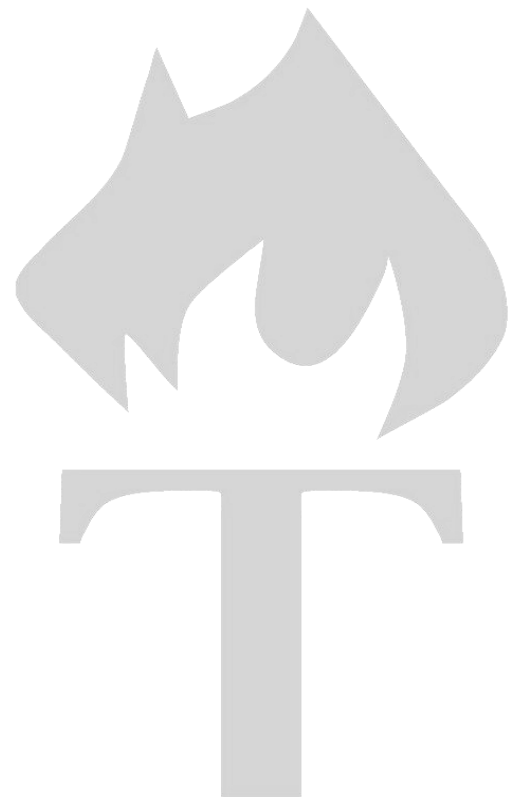
*Tips for Radio*

*Tips for Television*

*Op-Ed Basics*

*How to Write & Pitch an Op-Ed*

*Blogging Tips*



# Tips for Radio

- 1.) Start each answer with a short, declarative sentence—stating your conclusion FIRST.** Then no more than two or three sentences to finish your explanation. When you are done, be done -- interviewers will sometimes leave empty space to encourage you to talk and trip up, but you don't need to take the bait.
- 2.) Know what you're going to say.** Prepare your statements ahead of time, so you can speak with ease and confidence. Package your arguments in metaphors, stories, and images. Know your audience and anticipate the kinds of questions you're likely to get from the interviewer.
- 3.) It's not about political bias, it's about drama.** Interviewers are not biased against one or another party so much as they are biased towards creating tension or a fight to get a juicy story. Don't rise to the bait unless that's what you want. Try to stay calm and cool even when baited—they will sound silly, and you will sound in control.
- 4.) Answer questions, but don't forget your talking points.** Always try to remember your two or three main points and larger issues, and try to return to these naturally. If you dodge questions, you don't look as human—but you have a point you are trying to convey, and it is your job to convey it!
- 5.) Use proper nouns.** Avoid “it” and “that” to the extent possible--people tuning in and out need to know what you're talking about.
- 6.) Humanity counts.** A radio interview comes across to listeners as a conversation. Leaving an impression of your humanity is just as important as your answers. Content doesn't always get through, but being relaxed, human, endearing and seeming like a normal person comes through very clearly. Stay relaxed and confident, and treat it as best you can like talking over coffee with a friend.
- 7.) Smile as you speak.** People can hear a smile over the air. It conveys warmth, and it's a good thing. So unless you're talking about something awful – such as nuclear war – smile as you speak.
- 8.) Room for nuance.** Unlike TV, radio affords more room for nuance. Just make sure it's coherent nuance. Convolved or meandering sentences convey confusion, not sophistication.
- 9.) Relax!** When we get nervous our vocal cords close up. That hardly makes for a sweet-sounding voice on the radio. Do whatever it takes for you to relax your vocal cords. Have a cup of tea or a tablespoon of honey. Take a few deep breaths. Just make yourself calm!
- 10.) The interviewer is not your audience, the listening public is.** The interviewer is your FOIL to reach your audience—your bridge to the listening public. Use the foil to convey your message, and your humanity, to the audience – not the interviewer.

# Tips for Television

**1.) Humanity trumps content.** Like it or not, a TV interview is much more about leaving an impression of your humanity than answering the questions. Content doesn't really get through on TV. But whether you are relaxed, human, endearing and seem like a normal person comes through very clearly. Stay relaxed and confident, and treat it as best you can like talking over coffee with a friend. Smile A LOT!

**2.) Start each answer with a short, declarative sentence—stating your conclusion FIRST.** Then no more than two or three sentences to finish your explanation. When you are done, be done --TV interviewers will sometimes leave empty space to encourage you to talk and trip up, but you don't need to take the bait.

**3.) Know what you're going to say.** Prepare your statements ahead of time, so you can speak with ease and confidence. Package your arguments in metaphors, stories, and images. Know your audience and anticipate the kinds of questions you're likely to get from the interviewer.

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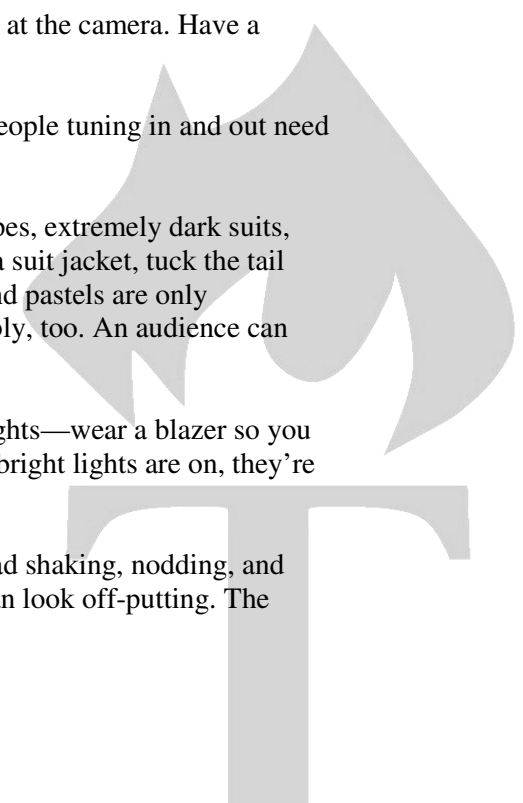
**7.) Look at the camera!** Since the reporter is not your audience, look at the camera. Have a conversation with the viewing public. That's who you want to reach.

**8.) Use proper nouns.** Avoid "it" and "that" to the extent possible--people tuning in and out need to know what you're talking about.

**9.) Wear solid colors – nothing too distracting.** Avoid tight pin stripes, extremely dark suits, short skirts (above knees), and distracting jewelry. If you're wearing a suit jacket, tuck the tail underneath you so the collar and shoulders don't rise up. Off-white and pastels are only appropriate for shirts or blouses that are part of suits. Dress comfortably, too. An audience can tell if you're uncomfortable.

**10.) Wear something warm.** TV studios are kept very cold for the lights—wear a blazer so you don't shiver! But make sure to have a handkerchief handy. When the bright lights are on, they're hot. You might need to wipe some sweat away.

**11.) Gesture with your head, not your hands.** Raised eyebrows, head shaking, nodding, and other head movement makes you look animated. Big hand gestures can look off-putting. The camera exaggerates everything, so small is beautiful.



# Op-Ed Basics

Op-Eds and letters to the editor in your local papers are invaluable and can have a large impact on fellow citizens. Moreover, members of Congress almost always read op-eds written locally by their constituents – so it’s a sure fire way to get your name and your cause in front of your Representative. Here are some basics about the submission process, as well as a step by step guide to writing an op-ed of your own.

## SUBMITTING OP-EDS

To have political impact, submitting op-eds to a regional publication that you have personal ties to (your hometown, state where you went to college, state where you/your family resides) has far more weight than submitting to a national publication. They are also more likely to be placed. For policy impact, national publications are useful.

Most national publications are “exclusive”—if you submit to them, you cannot submit to any other publication until they have said yes or no. This is another good reason to submit to regional and local publications, which will usually let you send your op-ed to many locations at once.

Op-eds should be sent to the general op-ed email address, and to as many other op-ed manager addresses as you can find at that publication. If the publication is exclusive, respect that.

The email should contain a short cover letter (see sample on the final page of this packet), with the op-ed cut and pasted below. The cover letter should be a one paragraph “pitch” that explains why you’re writing (to submit an op-ed) and who you are (your credentials – in other words, why your opinion is important). The op-ed should also be attached to the email. Be sure to include your name, day and evening phone numbers, return fax number, and e-mail address.

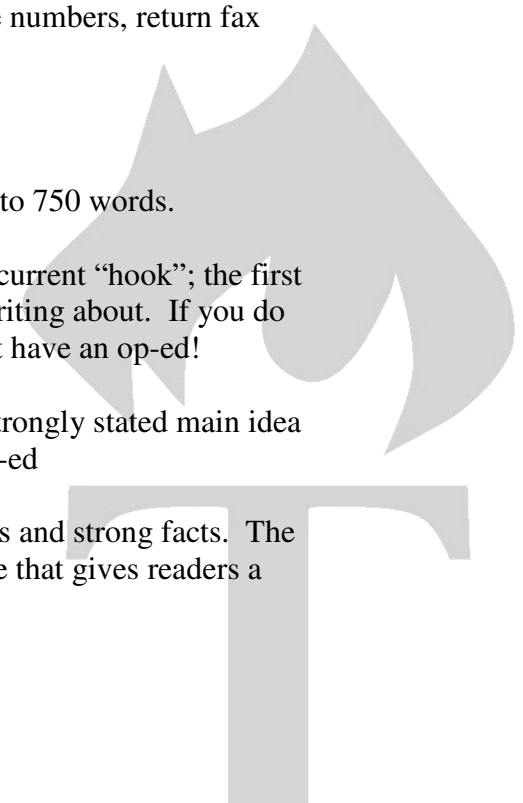
## OP-ED FORMAT

10-12 paragraphs of no more than 3-5 sentences each; total 600 to 750 words.

The first line grabs the reader’s attention with a local or VERY current “hook”; the first paragraph or second states the one, strong main point you are writing about. If you do not have one main point you are trying to make, then you do not have an op-ed!

Be sure to include a “pull quote”: a catchy, memorable line or strongly stated main idea that will stick with your readers a month after they read your op-ed

Middle paragraphs buttress your point with colloquial arguments and strong facts. The piece should end with a memorable, strong line. Include a byline that gives readers a reason to believe that you have credibility.



# How to Write an Op-Ed

When you write an op-ed, make sure you give a strong, clear opinion. Don't burden it with equivocations. Don't go overboard with qualifiers, adjectives, and adverbs. Be clear and direct! A good op-ed reveals a voice and personal experience behind the words, so cite personal experience when you can. Here's a paragraph-by-paragraph breakdown of what your op-ed should look like. Feel free to play with the order, or add or subtract paragraphs as you see fit. But be sure to follow this general outline!\*

**Paragraph 1: Current Event “Hook.”** Your piece needs to be timely. Otherwise the editors and readers you're trying to reach won't care. You have about a week after an event before it goes stale. It's also good to go local when possible, or capture readers' attention with a surprising story.

*Recently, the Kleine Brogel air base in Belgium was compromised when an anti-nuclear group breached security fencing and spent more than an hour on the base where U.S. nuclear weapons are suspected. Now imagine they were terrorists instead of peace activists.*

**Paragraph 2: Strong, Simple Statement of Your Argument.** Use strong language here, like “need” and “must.” You want to make your message absolutely clear.

*With enough nuclear material to build more than 120,000 Hiroshima-sized nuclear bombs spread around the globe, the nuclear terrorism threat is real and it's time to get serious about rapidly locking down and reducing these dangerous stockpiles.*

**Paragraphs 3-5: Short persuasive paragraphs that drive your point home about what's wrong.** Connect the dots, emphasizing why your recommendation is necessary. Any other simple and impressive facts from credible, current sources will do. Metaphors with vivid images and stories are extremely useful here.

***Metaphor:** Leaving loose nuclear materials unsecure is about as sensible as parking an unlocked van full of automatic weapons in a gang-plagued neighborhood.*

***Story:** Six nuclear warheads went missing from an air force base in the summer of 2007. For thirty-six hours, military officials could not account for the whereabouts of the deadly weapons. For fifteen hours, the warheads were guarded by nothing more than a chain-link fence and roving patrols. After a day and a half the weapons were finally located, but not before the world was reminded that lax nuclear security can lead to frightening consequences.*

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\* Most examples paraphrased from Toma & Luongo, “Facing the Nuclear Terrorism Threat,” *The Hill*, 12 March 2010; Sturm, “Nuclear Weapons: A New Paradigm for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Truman Project*, 30 July 2009.

**Paragraphs 6-8: Short persuasive paragraphs that drive your point home about what we ought to do.**

*This year the Obama administration and the Congress will have four unique opportunities to strengthen America's defense against nuclear terrorism and expand the global coalition that can support the president's goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear materials around the globe in four years...*

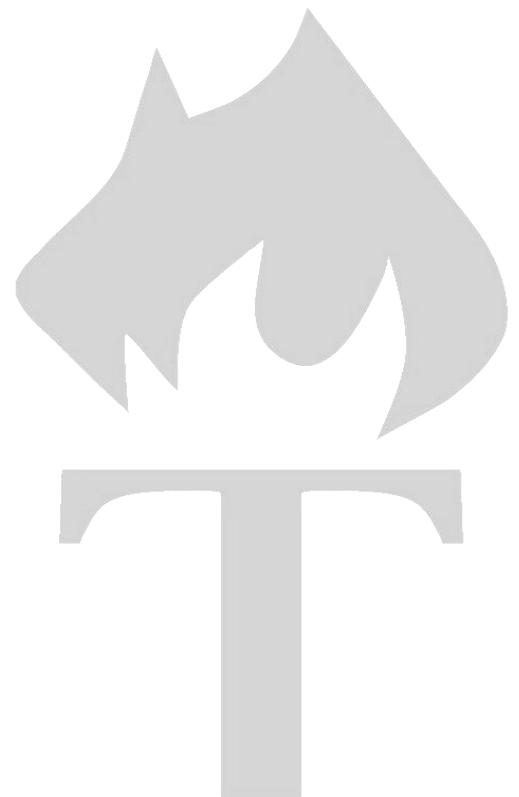
**Paragraphs 9-10: Knock Down Any Opposing Arguments**

This paragraph should summarize your recommendation and argue against the other side. For example:

*There is a sense in some nations and regions that nuclear terrorism is not an acute danger to them and that not much more needs to be done. But the United States learned the hard way on 9/11 that a failure to anticipate evolving threats does not free us from paying the price of inaction. And if there's any price we should do our utmost to avoid paying, it's the terrible cost of nuclear terrorism.*

**Paragraphs 11 and 12: Your Catchy Closing.** Use an emotional appeal at the end. Emotion is a crucial part of persuasive writing. While you should always ground your arguments on logic and reason, you should always package your arguments in a way that appeals to hearts as well as minds.

*For decades, the policy of mutually assured destruction kept the United States and the Soviet Union from descending into war. But in today's world, the greatest threat America faces is not a well-armed nation, but a shadowy terrorist network. America and its partners now have four opportunities to add locks to the door that stands between nuclear weapons and the terrorists who seek to use them. We wouldn't leave weapons out in the open for criminals. Let's not leave nuclear material out in the open for terrorists.*



## **Op-Ed Submission Email: Sample**

Dear SO AND SO,

My name is INSERT YOUR NAME and I'm writing to submit an op-ed to the INSERT NAME OF PAPER on the subject of INSERT SUBJECT MATTER HERE. I currently INSERT CURRENT JOB (IF RELEVANT TO SUBJECT); ENTER OTHER RELEVANT CREDENTIALS. I'm a native of INSERT HOMETOWN IF YOU HAVE REGIONAL TIES TO THE NEWSPAPER YOU'RE SUBMITTING TO. The op-ed is pasted below. (BETTER TO PASTE A PIECE INTO THE BODY OF AN EMAIL INSTEAD OF SENDING AN ATTACHMENT; ATTACHMENTS CAN GET CAUGHT IN SPAM FILTERS).

Thank you for your time and consideration, please feel free to be in touch.

Sincerely,  
YOUR NAME  
ADDRESS  
EMAIL  
PHONE NUMBER

PIECE PASTED HERE

### **Example of email submission for op-ed pieces**

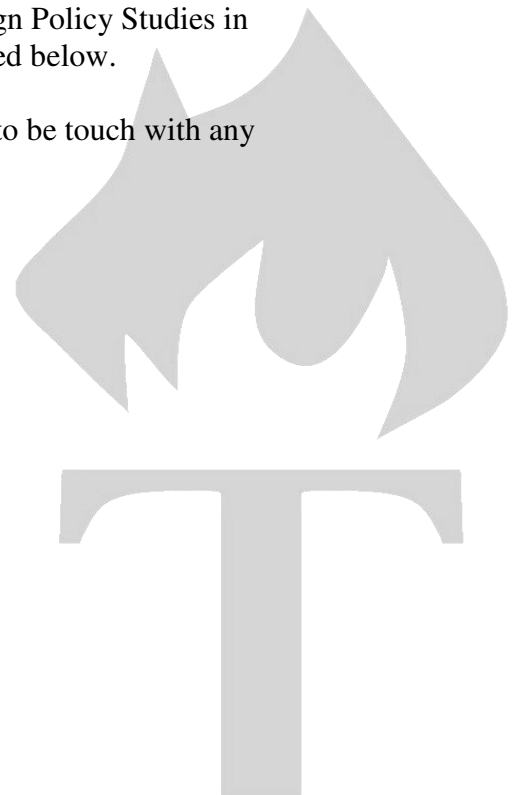
Dear Mr. Smith,

My name is Christopher Jones and I'm writing to submit an op-ed to the *Topeka Times* on the subject of President Obama's Afghanistan policy. I served in the US Marine Corps in Afghanistan and I'm currently working for the Institute of Foreign Policy Studies in Washington, DC. I'm also a native of Topeka. The op-ed is pasted below.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please feel free to be touch with any questions or comments you might have.

Sincerely,  
Christopher Jones  
5555 H St NW  
Washington, DC  
cjones@email.com  
202-555-5555

PIECE PASTED HERE



## Tips for Blogging

- Like newspapers, blogs have word limits. Respect them.
- Err on the side of brevity. The more clear, cogent, focused and short, the better.
- Always, always, always insert hyperlinks. 3-5 per blog post is a good rule of thumb. Link out to friends, experts, whoever.
- When writing for a blog for the first time, read a few posts. Some blogs read like op-ed pages. Some are more formal. Whatever the norm, follow it.
- Establish relationships with bloggers and blog editors. Once you prove your worth as a contributor, they'll want to have you back.
- Only start a new blog if you are able to update it multiple times on a daily basis. Otherwise, it'll likely get lost in the void of the internet. If you don't have that kind of time, but want to get into blogging anyway, then you should definitely work to establish ties with bloggers and blog editors.
- Use clear, strong headlines. For example, if you're writing about national security and torture, don't use some quirky title like "Tortured Logic." Be direct and clear, something like "The Torture Debate Will Be Won or Lost on National Security, not Morality or Legality."

