



Your Cause (in 600 words)

Six tips for writing more persuasive op-eds.

[Editor's note: *free-range thinking* occasionally features essays by guest contributors, and this month we're delighted to welcome Colin Rowan. His firm, Rowan Communication, Inc., works primarily with nonprofits, and Rowan says writing op-eds is one of his favorite tasks. He has written essays on global warming, mental health services, veterans' issues and renewable energy and placed them in publications from *The Washington Post* to everyone's favorite, *Biofuels Digest*.]

For some non-profits, getting an op-ed published is more productive than landing a good news story. Op-eds provide a more direct line to the audience, more control of your message and more room to make your case. In the course of writing, pitching and placing op-eds across the country for a wide range of clients, I've developed six reliable guidelines. You can read them in their entirety below, but you can see precisely how each guideline was applied in [an op-ed I helped a client write](#) and place in Fort Worth, Texas.



Colin Rowan

1. An op-ed should hammer home a single idea. Sure, you'll have to make several points along the way to show readers you're both knowledgeable and credible. But those points should all support *one opinion* that you want readers to share with you when they're done reading. If you can't state your op-ed's thesis in one clear, declarative sentence, stop writing and focus your energy here.

2. Be interesting first. (And remember: facts are *not* inherently interesting). You'll need facts and data to back up your argument, but readers need to be interested before they will fully engage. Stories about real people are one of the best ways to interest readers quickly. If you can introduce real people into your op-ed, do so *before* you dive into the data.

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We'll show you how starting January 11th



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3. Make it sound good. Like good speeches, op-eds should sound good when read aloud. They should have a cadence, intermingling short sentences with longer ones. Good op-eds reach out and connect with readers not just through the words on the page, but also in the way they are presented. If your piece *reads* smart but *sounds* boring, it probably is.

4. Every word counts (but some count a little more). Different audiences react to different words in different ways, but there are some words that work better for almost everybody. "Challenge" is better than "problem". "Investment" is better than "payment". Frank Luntz (the father of "death tax" among other winning combinations of words) may support most of the issues you oppose, but he's one of the best word experts in the country. And as he says, "it's not what you say, it's what they hear." Make sure you use words your audience likes to hear.

5. Ask your audience for something specific. People read your op-ed because they want to know what you think, not what you know. Yes, hard information is always important, but an op-ed without a call to action will usually fall flat for readers. If you have a solution you want people to adopt, spell it out clearly.

6. Say your piece and get off the stage. The longer and more complex your op-ed, the harder it will be to understand. Do not show off your Ivy League education with five-syllable words. Leave out anything that isn't completely necessary. Less is more. Always.

(Thanks to Colin Rowan for serving as this month's guest columnist. To learn more about his work, visit Rowan Communication, Inc.)

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Are You Communicating or Connecting?

There's a difference, and we'll show you why it's critical in our December webinar on strategic communications.

Did you know there are four points of connection between you and the audience you'd like to reach? If you know what they are, you can plan any form of outreach to touch all four points, but if you don't, you may be giving your audience an opportunity to disconnect and walk away.



In our two-hour online class ***Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter***, we'll identify The Four Connecting Points and show how three classic public interest campaigns used them to achieve remarkable results. In this process, we'll cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- An easy-to-use template for campaign design

Classes will be held on December 5th and 12th from 11a-12n PT each day. Tuition is \$250 per student, and discounts are available to organizations registering 3 or more. Register at The Goodman Center.

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New Year's Resolution: Tell Better Stories

Our most popular webinar returns on January 11th.

Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative returns in 2012 to help you tell more compelling stories about your organization's work, and we've made some important changes in the material we cover. Over the four weeks of the class, we will review:

- The fundamental structure of good stories
- The 7 qualities that make stories memorable
- The 9 most common mistakes in storytelling and how to avoid them
- The 6 kinds of stories you must tell, and how to tell them for advocacy, development, recruitment and more



Each online class runs 1 hour, and our next set of classes are scheduled for January 11, 18, 25 and February 1 from 9-10a Pacific each day. Tuition is \$500 per student and discounts are available to organizations registering 3 or more. Find out more and reserve your space at [The Goodman Center](#).

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