

HKS Communications Program Online Workshop
Renée Loth, Opinion columnist for *The Boston Globe* and HKS Adjunct
Lecturer **Writing Workshop: “The ABC’s of Op-ed Writing”**

Renée Loth’s bullet points:

The ABC’s of successful op eds:

Accuracy

Brevity

Clarity

Accuracy:

- *Get the facts
- * Support your assertions with verified, credible sources.
- * Even small errors (dates, spellings) can undermine your credibility.

Brevity:

- *Stiff competition for the reader’s attention
- *Get to the point and get there fast.
- * Don’t waste precious time with tangents, clearing your throat, or with a lengthy anecdote

Clarity:

- *Don’t start writing until you can express your main point in one sentence; roughly 25 words.
- * Be specific: don’t write in generalities
- * Avoid jargon, blizzards of acronyms, and flowery or technical language
- * The “cousin Sam test.” Think of a person who is smart, curious, but not a specialist in your field. Write as if writing a letter to them.

THE NUT GRAF

This is the most essential of all the elements that go into an op-ed.

What is your main argument *in a nutshell*? (thus: nut) Put it in a *paragraph* (thus: graf) and place it high up in your op-ed.

It is the kernel, the essential point, the central theme of your op ed that signals to the reader: *this* is what the op ed will be about, and this is why you should care.

(and it can be a nut sentence or even a nut phrase.)

Other key elements of the op-ed form

(more or less in this order):

Lead - The opening sentence must grab the reader’s attention. Could pose a question, tell a brief human story, but please don’t open with a statistic.

Nut graf - (see above)

Evidence - Support the argument you made in the nut graf. Use evidence from credible sources. Don't rely on links to do the work for you.

Objection - Important. When you write your own argument in one sentence, also write the best counter-argument in one sentence. Raise it in a "To be sure..." or "Some say..." type graf.

Response - now, respectfully knock down that opposing argument.

Conclusions - "What is to be done?"

Kicker - Possibly restate your main point but do it with a 'zinger.' Don't (generally) end with a quote in someone else's voice. The last word should be yours.

PITCHING

*Make sure to familiarize yourself with the publications you will be pitching. Get to know their rhythms, tastes, types of pieces they tend to run to make sure your op-ed is a good 'fit.'

*Don't worry about having a counter-typical viewpoint, however.

* Email a real person if you can

* Make sure the subject line sings

* PASTE in your op ed (don't attach) and open with a *brief* note saying who you are, what the op-ed says (one sentence) whether it is time-urgent, and whether you are offering it to the publication exclusively.