

Explanation: Op-Ed Pieces vs. Letters to the Editor

"Op-ed pieces" essentially occur when newspapers publish an entire letter submitted by an individual or group. An op-ed piece is similar in form and content to an editorial a newspaper might publish itself, but represents the opinion of an individual writer - often someone not associated with the newspaper. The op-ed piece should use arguments to present an informed view, on a newsworthy topic, emphasizing the author's personal viewpoint if possible. While op-ed pieces could be up to 1,200 words, they are much more likely to be published if they are less than 600 words. In the op-ed piece you will desire to grab the audience with an original thought within the first paragraph or two. In the style of news reporting, paragraphs are usually kept short - two or three sentences.

A "Letter to the Editor" is a much shorter piece - usually not exceeding 200 words or a couple of paragraphs. Even then, newspapers often edit the submission down, and will only publish several sentences. While comments of a general nature are published, the best letters to the editor contain a description of a personal experience. An example might be, "I have never felt like I could make a difference, until I joined The Pickens Plan." Or, "I just worked with people from around the country on a presentation which can be utilized to spread the word about The Pickens Plan."

For both of the foregoing, chances for publication are greater if: (1) several persons sign the letter (particularly for op-ed pieces); (2) the persons who sign are actual subscribers to the newspaper and/or reside in the geographical area served by the newspaper; and (3) you look at the "Opinion" page of the web site page of the newspaper, and follow all rules for submitting the pieces.