

The Dallas Morning News

What is a Letter to the Editor?

A Letter to the Editor is a short comment on any article in the paper that a reader submits for possible publication. It is not, literally, correspondence with Dallas Morning News Editor Mike Wilson or any other specific editor or writer. Correspondence, complaints, [news tips](#) or [customer service](#) issues should not be submitted via the letter to the editor form. For a full list of contacts at The Dallas Morning News, [go here](#).

How to submit a Letter to the Editor

Please include your name, address with ZIP code and a daytime phone number.

You can submit your letter [by online form](#).

Secret top 10 tips to improve your chances of getting your Letter to the Editor published

1. Sign 'em. Include postal address and phone number. No pseudonyms, please. Our reporters face the world; you can, too. We haven't lost a letter writer yet.
2. Keep 'em short. Fewer than 200 words best. Fewer than 100 words better.
3. Be timely. Commenting on month-old news rarely cuts it.
4. Focus on the one thing you want to say. We edit for length, clarity and punctuation. We want everyone to shine!
5. School yourself by reading the Letters page to see what gets picked. Being funny, wise, pointed, emotive, civil, polite and accurate on diverse subjects is good. Using name-calling or list-making, or being dull, lengthy, incendiary and inaccurate is bad.
6. We publish a cross-section of the mail we receive, including those that disagree with our views. Our bias is only toward short letters.
7. Feel free to include extra information to buttress your arguments, but put it outside of the text of your letter.
8. You may write as often as you like, but due to the enormous mail we receive, the letters editor Scrooge will only publish one example of your fabulous prose every 30 days.
9. Form letters are routed immediately to the wastebasket. Poetry too.
10. Make it interesting, not redundant of what other letter writers have already written.

Remember, we get 1,000 letters a week. As a result, most cannot be published. If you don't succeed the first time, try again and again.

What is a Viewpoints column? Viewpoints, or op-eds, are opinion columns that are often written by people who do not work for the newspaper. Our op-ed columns run about 600 words, though we also like shorter pieces. Email your column to viewpoints@dallasnews.com.

Please include your name, address, phone number, a short description of what you do for a living and anything else we should know about you that's relevant to the topic of your column.

How to improve your chances of getting your Viewpoints column published

So, you want to sit down and write that op-ed column you've had on your mind the last couple of weeks, but you're not sure how to get started. Here are 10 tips for composing a column that's so persuasive it will persuade even your mother-in-law:

1. Select a topic you feel passionate about. If you're not excited by it, you'll never get your readers interested.
2. Have an opinion. That's what makes an op-ed column different from a news story or a feature article: It expresses the view of the writer.
3. Make sure your topic is appropriate for a short, 600-word column, rather than a master's thesis. To help you focus, try writing your main point in one sentence.
4. Express your opinion in the first paragraph or two. Let your readers know where you're headed; don't leave them guessing.
5. Provide concrete support for the points you make. Statistics, expert testimony and research are ways to persuade others that you're being reasonable.
6. But don't get carried away with numbers or quotes. While they can help make your argument, they're only the backup singers. You're the star.
7. Draw on your own personal experience, too, if it's relevant and helps to illustrate your viewpoint. That can be very persuasive.
8. Avoid sounding too preachy. You'll be more likely to persuade others if you don't lecture them; just talk to them.
9. Give your writing some personality. People should have some sense of you after reading your words.
10. Have a good last line. It's your final chance to drive home your point. End with a bang, not a whimper.

OK, now get started. Collect your thoughts before you begin writing. Our op-ed columns run about 600 words, though we also like shorter pieces. After you're done, look over your writing to be sure it's as sharp and crisp as you can make it. Good writers are good editors, too. When you're satisfied with your work, send it to us.

We look forward to reading your opinions.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/opinion/2016/12/20/tips-letters-editor-op-ed-submissions>

How To Pitch Journalists More Successfully

Inside Higher Ed | September 28, 2017

Alex Kingsbury and Michael J. Socolow outline six things academics can do to get on the same page with editors.

By [Alex Kingsbury and Michael J. Socolow](#)

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/09/28/advice-academics-when-working-journalists-essay>



Just because you can read a newspaper, doesn't mean you can write for one. Sure, it's writing at a sixth-grade reading level. But writing well for a newspaper or magazine audience can be a vexing challenge for people who do it every day, let alone those who only dabble with an op-ed once a year.

Yet in the age of fake news and pseudoscience, the need for academics to reach the public is more urgent than ever. Scholars seek relevance in public debate, and impact for their research, while news editors are

starving for compelling ideas, thoughtfully expressed.

This transaction should be symbiotic. Often it is. More often, it isn't.

In the interest of getting academics and editors on the same page, we've composed a short list of tips for pitching a journalistic outlet and joining the conversation:

Have a newspeg: There must be an immediately apparent reason why this piece is relevant right now. Not yesterday, not tomorrow. Time is compressed in journalism, and scholars need to envision what it's like to work under such pressure. To think strategically, scholars should look at the calendar. Is there an overlooked anniversary coming up? A vote in Congress that most readers won't be aware of? Is there a pattern of occurrences that speak to a larger trend in your field? Look at recent events and deduce how today's news will likely be repeated soon.

For example: It's an unfortunate reality that a police officer will be caught on video shooting a suspect and that the video will go viral sometime in the near future. Or a scholar might look at the several recent episodes of political violence - everything from the shooting of Congressman Steve Scalise to the brutality that occurred in Charlottesville - and conclude that another similar episode is inevitable. Start writing that essay now - so you're ahead of the news. Draft up the 600 words, and keep it in a file. When something does happen, update with a strong lede and pitch quickly. Newsrooms do this often for the obituaries of famous people. Many events are predictable, which is why fortune -- and the front page -- both favor the well-prepared.

Start with a great lede: A "lede" is the opening of any piece of journalism. It should pierce the cheek like a fishhook with a barb that's strong enough to hold the reader and pull them through the piece. A sentence or two is all you get to do so. A good lede is short, tight and engaging. If your lede fails to capture the editor's attention, your essay -- no matter how fabulous -- likely won't get the chance to hook any readers at all. It is the most important sentence in your piece and should be written for your gate-keeping audience of one. Write it and re-write it. Try going short -- cut out the commas and extra clauses. Read it out loud. It can be very difficult to sculpt a memorable lede. But when it works, you'll know it.

Write tight: Too many academics simply don't know how to communicate clearly and succinctly. To write effectively, one must be able to express complex ideas in clear, simple prose. Abandon adverbs. Embrace brevity. Learn to love sentence fragments. This problem is deeper than just wordiness and avoiding jargon. Basic compositional flaws often bog down what should be engaging writing.

For example: a dearth of action verbs slows an essay. For some reason, academics just don't employ enough action verbs. Action verbs propel sentences. They establish rhythm. They comprise the foundation of journalistic communication. Meanwhile, sentences that are overly long, ponderously caveated, lousy with intellectual digressions and lacking in lyricism slow down even the most compelling pieces. Short packs punch.

Advance the conversation: This might appear a low hurdle, but a surprising number of academics approach public communication with a more educative and less engaging goal. Nobody is interested in an academic synthesis that encapsulates scholarly debate. With fewer than 800 words, you simply don't have time for an introductory exposition summarizing multiple perspectives on the issue at hand. Any summary and synthesis must also be stimulating and engaging.

Scholars might dismiss this as selling clickbait, but it's about finding the most effective way to package the added value of your expertise. In today's social media universe, it's likely that your specific idea or take has already been tweeted and circulated. In the hypercompetitive world of contemporary journalism, most journalism outlets expect those who submit material to not only know details of current discussion, but to also be able to clearly identify their specific addition to that discussion.

Read where you're pitching: The best way to learn the writing style of the outlet where you'd like to be published is to read it. Many of the pitches that editors receive are either bulk submissions, sent to hundreds of editors, or completely unsuited to the publication they work for. Read to improve your writing and write for where you'll be read. Pitch your intended publication pieces they'd be crazy to reject.

Learn how to handle rejection: The rejection rate for a large daily metropolitan newspaper can surpass even the most prestigious academic journals. Every day hundreds of excellent essays cross the transom at America's top newspapers. That's not an exaggeration. Unlike applying to university, there are no fees. So essays can go to hundreds of editors simultaneously in an email blast. Skilled wordsmiths employed by strategic communication firms earn big salaries by composing op eds in newspapers around the United States. Scholars pitching journalists are no longer competing in their niche research domain; rather, they are pushing into a huge public conversation that's severely constricted by multiple factors.

There's the real estate in the actual newspaper, or the number of stories that can be promoted on any given homepage. But there's also the protection and promotion of the brand. Newspapers in the big cities, and their websites, are -- to some extent -- the last bastion of the text-based mass audience. They still provide the essential building blocks of communal knowledge and local political engagement. That remains a huge responsibility. In this sense, the daily (and even hourly) mix must always be carefully and selectively curated.

For this reason, an outstanding essay on a subject covered elsewhere in the newspaper two days earlier might very well not make it. Rather than assume the editor is an idiot who can't recognize genius, or be personally affronted or insulted, view rejection as an opportunity. Tinker with the essay and pitch it again elsewhere. Put it away and try again when the moment is more accommodating. All writers possess pieces they love that have been rejected that remain in their computers awaiting their moment. Rather than consider rejection as a finality, use it as motivation. Keep plugging away.

Publishing will always be more about perseverance in the face of rejection than any instant recognition. But if scholars truly seek to shape public discussion and reach audiences outside of academe, they should have at least passing fluency in the way that journalism works.

Bio

Alex Kingsbury is deputy Ideas editor at the Boston Globe. Michael J. Socolow teaches journalism at the University of Maine.

Read more by [Alex Kingsbury and Michael J. Socolow](#)

Public Engagement Is a Two-Way Street

Inside Higher Ed | October 23, 2017

Claiming that academics are failing to engage with the general public is intellectual laziness at best and anti-intellectual posturing at worst, argues Adam Kotsko.

By [Adam Kotsko](#)

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/10/23/claiming-academics-arent-engaging-public-wrongheaded-essay>



It is a common refrain: academics need to get out of their ivory towers and start engaging with the general public. It can come from a place of sympathy, worrying that valuable ideas are not reaching the public, or it can come from a place of dismissiveness, implying that academic debates need to change radically to become relevant to the broader populace. But in either case, the hidden premise is that academics must propagate their work to the largest possible audience and that they are obviously failing to do so.

When I come across such sentiments, I have a variety of reactions. The first is irritation, because we live in an unprecedented golden age of public engagement by academics. Never before in human history have there been so many blogs, web repositories, periodicals and book series dedicated to bringing academic concepts and debates to a broad, educated audience. More than that, individual academics have never been so accessible for dialogue, thanks to social media. Anyone who thinks that academics are not engaging with the public is falling victim to a common pitfall of the internet age: the assumption that if something has not presented itself to you with no effort or research on your part, then it must not exist.

More than that, these claims ignore the fact that -- as Carrie Shanafelt, assistant professor of English at Fairleigh Dickinson University, has pointed out many times on Facebook -- academics are engaging with a diverse cross-section of the public every single day via teaching. College campuses may not be fully representative of America as a whole, but the population of the average public university is much more representative than, say, the audience for Fox News, CNN or *The New Yorker*. And, again, literally never before in human history have there been as many university students as there are today -- meaning that academics are reaching an unprecedentedly large swath of the general public, often at a particularly formative moment of their intellectual development.

Claiming that academics are failing to engage with the general public is intellectual laziness at best and anti-intellectual posturing at worst. And that brings me to my second reaction, which is to ask exactly which public we are supposed to engage with. Is it the public that is not willing to run a simple Google search before declaring that public-facing academic work does not exist? Is it the public that so devalues the work of teaching that it doesn't even occur to them to think of it as a form of public engagement? Or do they have in mind the public that tolerates ever-shrinking public support for higher education and turns a blind eye to the destruction of the profession through adjunctification?

And what public sphere do they want us to appear in? Do they want us to appear on cable talk shows? There are television journalists, such as MSNBC host Chris Hayes, who do good, intellectually rigorous work. But most of the time academic experts who appear on TV are constantly badgered and interrupted, when they aren't being flatly contradicted by completely unqualified pundits who value their partisan agenda over the truth. Despite those obstacles, academics do continue to appear on such shows, and some academics have become minor media celebrities -- a fact that is completely ignored by those who mourn the lack of academic engagement with the public.

Would they like us to write for mainstream media? Here again, we already do, in huge numbers. Academics write regular columns for prestigious publications across the ideological spectrum, and many more write occasional op-ed and feature articles -- despite the dismissive, uncomprehending or hostile responses we often receive.

Or are they picturing an engagement with the right-wing media? There the situation is even worse, as they are continually on the lookout for superficially offensive sound bites. Without any concern for context or tone, right-wing publications direct their readers on campaigns of systematic harassment, ultimately aimed at getting the hapless victim fired -- often for remarks that are ironic or intentionally hyperbolic. They are happy to leap to the defense of free speech when progressive students protest against a conservative speaker, but they are even more eager to subject people to public humiliation and threaten their livelihood for saying the wrong thing.

A Genuine Exchange?

In short, why should academics engage the general public? I know that in asking this question, I am courting charges of academic blasphemy. Among the sacred cows of the contemporary university, public engagement is right up there with the holy trinity of excellence, leadership and diversity. One thing that makes such values unquestionable, of course, is that they are positive yet vague. No one would argue that leadership is unimportant, and that automatic consensus masks the fact that the most crucial questions -- about the meaning of leadership, the motivations behind it, the direction we need to be led and so on -- have been passed over in silence.

Similarly, in our rush to affirm the sacred value of public engagement, we seldom stop to reflect on what such a thing would actually mean. Above all, any public engagement worthy of the name would have to be a two-way street. If academics are to engage with the public, then the public must be willing to engage with academics. I am not asking that the public blindly accept our intellectual authority but that they should be open-minded and minimally receptive. That is the condition for any conversation worthy of the name, and it is a condition that is sorely lacking in our contemporary environment.

A genuine exchange between academics and the broader public would require people to let down their guard and be willing to do a little work. As it stands, academics, especially in the humanities, often face the demand to justify the value of their field of study -- and I always want to ask, "Really! You don't understand why it's valuable to study literature or history or ask big questions?" The very fact that the question is even being posed means that the exchange is doomed in advance. It would be much more productive if nonacademics recognized that academics are human beings and that if a fellow human being is willing to devote their life to studying a topic, there must be something interesting about it.

Similarly, academics are often castigated for using jargon or complex prose. And I will admit that not all academics are gifted prose stylists. Yet sometimes expressing a new idea requires us to find a new word, and expressing a complicated idea may require more nuance than the Associated Press style guide permits. Demanding absolute clarity and simplicity amounts to demanding never to encounter anything new or difficult. Why not give academic writing -- which is, again, produced by human beings -- at least some benefit of the doubt?

Sadly, these simple, humane recommendations for genuine dialogue seem impossibly utopian in contemporary America. But until academics can expect such a reception, they will not have a public to engage with. Thus, if politicians and journalists really want public engagement with academics, they need to stop parodying and persecuting academics and should instead cultivate the kind of respect and receptivity that would make it possible.

Bio

Adam Kotsko teaches in the Shimer Great Books School of North Central College. He is the author, most recently, of [The Prince of This World](#) (Stanford University Press) and blogs at [An und für sich](#).

Read more by [Adam Kotsko](#)