

**Opinion Writing Tips
For Our Kids
March 13**

Timing is essential.

- Connect your content directly to something happening in the news (or that happened recently or is about to happen).
- For a letter to the editor: react to a breaking news story, or respond to an oped to offer an alternative view on the news story or a deeper insight into the news story. Correct misinformation or provide the “other side” of an issue.
- For a reactive oped: connect the news to a broader issue. The news could be a recent report or event or political or policy development.
- For proactive opeds: look ahead to an upcoming event that will provide a fresh news hook to discuss an issue

Stick to word counts

- Check the newspaper’s word count for opeds or letters. Most of this is published online under submission guidelines or in the contact us section.
- Risks of writing too long: Newspapers have limited space and editors generally won’t take the time to cut a long article down to size. They either won’t run an article that is too long or they will cut the text – and might cut parts you think are critical.

Make a single point — well.

- You cannot solve all of the world’s problems in 150 or 700 words. Make a single point clearly and persuasively.
- Try to explain your key message in one to two sentences. If you can’t, you’re trying to cover too much.

Offer recommendations.

- An oped is not a news story that describes a situation; it is your opinion about how to improve an issue.
- Explain what needs to change, how it needs to change & who needs to do the changing. Don’t just call for “more research.”

Opening lines matter

- Whether an oped or letter to the editor, you need to capture the reader’s attention right away.
- A few tactics for opening lines:
 - Personal experience - a short anecdote can be powerful
 - Creative imagery - paint a picture for the reader
 - Creative language - play around with expressions

Organizing content

- **Borrow from the inverted pyramid structure of newspaper articles.**
- Don't bury your main point. Quickly answer: who, what, where, when & why something matters
- Organizing the body of your text: evidence, issues, quotes, etc that expand your argument.
 - Lists can organize evidence, recommendations, research etc
 - Repetition can be helpful if there is a common theme to the supporting evidence or problem.
 - Extended metaphors can help lead the reader from one paragraph to the next.

Tell readers why they should care.

- Put yourself in the place of the indifferent reader. At the end of every few paragraphs of an oped or each sentence in a letter to the editor, ask yourself out loud: "So what? Who cares?" Explain why it matters. Who does it impact? Why does it matter now?

Showing is better than telling.

- Readers remember colourful details better than dry facts. When writing an oped article, look for great examples that will bring your argument to life. Don't just include statistics. Balance statistics with stories of how an issue impacts specific people.

Use short sentences and paragraphs.

- Oped and letters to the editor usually have short sentences and short paragraphs. Remember, it's not an academic essay.

Avoid jargon.

- If a technical detail is not essential to your argument, don't use it. If you need to use a technical term, explain it in plain language.
- Simple language doesn't mean simple thinking; it means you are being considerate of readers who lack your expertise.

Use the active voice.

- Don't write: "It is hoped that [or: One would hope that] the government will ..."
Instead, say "I hope the government will ..." Active voice is shorter, easier to read and leaves no doubt about who is doing the hoping, recommending or other action.

Respect the other side.

- People writing letters to the editor or opeds sometimes make the mistake of piling on one reason after another why they're right and their opponents are wrong, if not idiots. They'd appear more credible, and reasonable if they acknowledged the ways in which their opponents are right, even if you ultimately disagree with the other side's conclusions.

Make your ending a winner.

- For an oped, try to summarize your argument in a strong final paragraph. If your oped doesn't have a strong concluding paragraph or statement, it probably may not get published.
- For a letter to the editor, consider a strong last line. It can be impactful, visual, funny. Just something that makes the piece stand out.

Expect the headline to change

- The newspaper will write its own headline. You can suggest one, but don't be surprised if the headline you suggest isn't the one the oped is published under.

Offer graphics.

- If you have a terrific illustration, photo, video or other asset that might accompany your article, alert the editor when you send it.

A note on pitching opeds

If you can, try to find out the name of the editorial, opinions or letters page editor and send the email directly to them, cc'ing the generic letters/opinions email address. Start your email with an excerpt from your piece - the strongest two lines in it.

Then below that include more information. eg,

-sample pitch email ---

Dear {{{editor's name}}}

Walking beside a glacier last winter, the pristine ice gave me an enormous sense of peace -- and an even bigger sense of guilt over how I will eventually explain to my son that my generation let this place disappear because our elected leaders didn't have the courage or conviction to act quickly enough to address the climate crisis.

Attached and copied and pasted below please find an oped calling on Canada's leaders to strengthen bill C-12, which is expected to be debated in the House of Commons this week. [{{note link to news cycle}}](#)

OPINION WRITING EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

Letter to the Editor (LTE) and Opeds

LTE: visual imagery, strong ending

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editors/2021/03/07/for-todays-politically-engage-d-youth-the-environment-is-a-priority.html

Re:Tories fear O'Toole will put a price on carbon, March 3

Any party serious about winning the youth vote in a potential 2021 election will not only endorse the carbon tax but have a credible plan for phasing out fossil fuels as soon as possible and making sure Indigenous, racialized and front-line communities are prioritized in a green and just recovery.

Aping the Liberals' promises won't cut it and the Liberals themselves are going to need to be bolder, with the party's throne speech last fall roundly criticized by youth as being underwhelming.

Overall, the majority of Gen Z and Millennial voters favour parties with more ambitious climate change platforms than the Conservatives. With politically engaged TikTokers, Instagram-savvy explainers and savage climate memes, environmentally literate youth aren't going to be fooled by the usual greenwashing.

Any plan that ignores this is bound to have even less credibility **than the laugh-cry emoji, side parts and skinny jeans combined.**

Jesse Firempong, Powell River, B.C.

LTE: strong visual imagery

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/letters/article-feb-21-the-absolute-worst-readers-debate-travelling-snowbirds-plus/>

Re Highway 413 Is A Sprawl Accelerator_(Editorial, Feb. 16):

Build another highway? Yikes.

Most of us have seen the T-shirts showing the London tube system (add to that buses serving a population of over eight million, all the while with a river running through the centre of the city). It's simply a matter of having an accessible public transportation system and a public with a mindset to use it. Rolling out an efficient vaccination program is not the only thing that Britain seems to have got right.

Riding the system is usually interesting if we let it be, and stronger than a cup of coffee to get us going. It works, let's do it.

Dean Chamberlain, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Oped: First person narrative

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/the-saturday-debate/2021/03/06/the-saturday-debate-does-the-cancellation-of-the-keystone-xl-pipeline-hurt-indigenous-people.html>

In 2013, I joined a 14-kilometre healing walk through the heart of the tar sands near Fort McMurray, Alta. I came from Quebec to support Treaty 8 and Treaty 6 peoples and draw attention to how industry is polluting land, water and air.

We were surprised when some truckers honked in support. We were told, "If they could choose another job, they would." On the same day, a train transporting fracked oil exploded in Lac Mégantic, Que., killing 47 people. . .

-Melissa Mollen Dupuis, Member of the Innu community of Ekuanitshit, co-organizer of the Quebec branch of the Idle No More movement

Oped: First person narrative

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/01/29/banking-on-the-future-of-our-children.html>

Remember getting your first bank account? Your parents probably helped you, and you likely didn't have any opinions about it, much like the family toothpaste. For me, my mom helped me open an account with RBC and it seemed much the same as any bank.

But when we recently helped our son open his first account recently, things were different. We did it at a credit union instead, and made sure he knew we were doing this because the big banks were undermining his future by pouring hundreds of billions into fossil fuels. . .

-Matt Price is with [For Our Kids](#), a national network of climate-concerned parents and grandparents working for change. The organization is participating in a day of action on banks this Friday.

Oped: Personal, relatable opening

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/road-ahead-samir-kayande-keystone-xl-pipeline-1.5895592>

I'm so profoundly, bone-deeply tired of Keystone XL.

It's the annoying drunk uncle at Thanksgiving dinner; the extremely annoying parents of your toddler's best friend. I prefer them both to even five more minutes of talking about KXL.

But here we are. Perhaps, for now at least, this dead pipeline will do me the favour of remaining dead for a while. KXL won't save Alberta oil jobs, and losing it won't kill jobs that weren't dying

anyway. Our own careers are not helped by imbuing the pipeline with even more meaning than it already has....

-Samir Kayande, a consultant with 25 years experience in the energy sector.

Oped: Creative language

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/road-ahead-carbon-tax-lies-misinformation-communication-1.5846407>

Death and taxes may be the only certainties in life, but over the last few years conservatives in Canada have done their best to add misrepresenting the federal carbon tax to that list.

-Max Fawcett

Oped: Paints a picture

<https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/william-halliday-beluga-whistles-and-clicks-could-be-silenced-by-an-increasingly-noisy-arctic-ocean>

Under the sea ice, the Arctic Ocean is one of the quietest places on Earth. But it can be very noisy when the ice is forming and breaking up, or during storms and when glaciers are calving.

Beluga whales, the so-called canaries of the sea, call this environment their home. Belugas whistle to communicate and they make high-frequency clicking sounds for echolocation, which they use to navigate the dark marine environment and to find food. mily worried about the darkness of her son's skin, Meghan tells Oprah

Sound is an integral part of a beluga's life, so the quality of the underwater acoustic environment is very important for the health and survival of belugas. Yet climate change is transforming the Arctic marine environment, and it is likely becoming more noisy underwater . . .

-William Halliday is an adjunct assistant professor at the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, University of Victoria.

Oped: Creative visual imagery and language

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/opinion-alberta-s-new-budget-merely-postpones-the-fiscal-reckoning-1.5928921>

Before delivering the new provincial budget Thursday, Alberta Finance Minister Travis Toews bought himself new cowboy boots.

A pair of ballet shoes would have been more appropriate.

Toews's budget does a lot of dancing, much of it on eggshells.

-Graham Thomson

Ending that nods to the opening

<https://www.thestar.com/business/opinion/2021/02/13/this-might-be-the-year-that-canada-starts-saying-yes-to-clean-energy.html>

Every innovator knows what “Yes but” means. It’s two words that tell you that while the person you’re pitching understands the problem, they’re not ready to invest in your solution.

You get a lot of “Yes but” when your business is clean technology. Despite the obvious need for it, there have long been enormous barriers to getting new clean tech developed, financed and adopted. Many of them are legitimate and daunting — too different, too impractical, too expensive.s

But we may start hearing less of that little phrase in 2021. . .

Ending: So hang in there, Canadian clean-tech innovators. After so many years of honing and pitching your ideas, this could be the one when we finally start seeing them become reality. In 2021, we could start hearing less “Yes but” — and more just plain “Yes.”

-Yung Wu is the CEO of MaRS Discovery District

Ending that nods to the opening

<https://www.hilltimes.com/2020/12/24/canada-needs-to-deliver-to-stem-climate-change/276422>

Darius Elias remembers childhood summers spent out on the land in Old Crow Flats, northern Yukon wetlands, where members of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation spent months harvesting food each year. But few travel to Old Crow Flats these days, as climate change has transformed the land.

Today, dramatic permafrost thaw and drained lakes make it difficult and potentially dangerous for Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation members to access the wild foods they use to ensure their food security and maintain their culture. In 2019, the First Nation declared a [climate emergency](#) and [called](#) on Canada to take urgent action to address these impacts. . . .

Ending: Back in Yukon, Elias’ community is acting with the urgency that seems to be lacking in Ottawa. They’re in the final stages of a new [solar project](#)—which has attracted federal government funding—that will help reduce their dependence on diesel. Canada should show more of the same initiative and implement a concrete plan to radically reduce emissions, or risk fuelling even more devastating impacts in the near future, not just in Yukon, but throughout Canada and the world over.

-Rachel LaFortune is an Ottawa-based environment researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Oped: Ending that nods to the ending & compelling evidence to support an argument

<https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/op-ed/comment-horgan-s-runaway-costs-on-site-c-enough-is-enough-1.24290022>

Opeds with content organized by lists

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-federal-climate-plan-provides-the-clarity-th-at-canadas-economy/>

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-to-avoid-a-climate-disaster-governments-must-do-these-seven-things-and/>

Repetition

<https://www.hilltimes.com/2021/03/01/bardswick/286110>

Uncertainty can be paralyzing. And, when the stakes are high, doubly so. Ask five people how Canada should get to net-zero emissions by 2050, and you may get six answers. There is no shortage of ideas: electrification, carbon capture and storage, direct air capture, hydrogen fuel, small modular nuclear—all are on the table, and many more. As a result, uncertainty and debate persists around the relative importance of any one solution on the way to net zero.

But here's the thing: uncertainty isn't all or nothing. **We know more** than enough today to start confidently down the road to net zero. **We know about** the main forces and factors shaping Canada's net-zero transition. **We know enough** to lay some smart bets that will pay off in the long run. **And we know** collaboration between governments, the public and private sectors, and among Canadians is critical to make it happen.

-Martha Hall Findlay is the chief sustainability officer at Suncor Energy. Kathy Bardswick is president of the Canadian Institute for Climate Choices.

Repetition

<https://www.straight.com/news/linda-nowlan-just-is-justice-especially-when-it-comes-to-climate>

... **There's injustice** in terms of which [countries](#) caused the crisis. Close to one quarter of cumulative fossil fuel CO2 emissions over the past 250 years came from the USA, compared to just 2.8 percent from the whole continent of Africa.

There's injustice when those whose ["ways of being have been practised since time immemorial"](#) and traditional territories are at risk from climate change. Sea level rise and warming ocean waters in B.C. will particularly impact Indigenous communities and others who harvest wild salmon and other fish and shellfish, [says the B.C. Centre for Disease Control](#).

And **there's injustice** in whose health will suffer. . .

-Linda Nowlan JD, MA, is the senior director of the UBC Sustainability Initiative, and an adjunct professor in the Allard School of Law.

Extended comparison

<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/opinion-why-sharp-reductions-in-co2-emissions-are-needed-urgently>