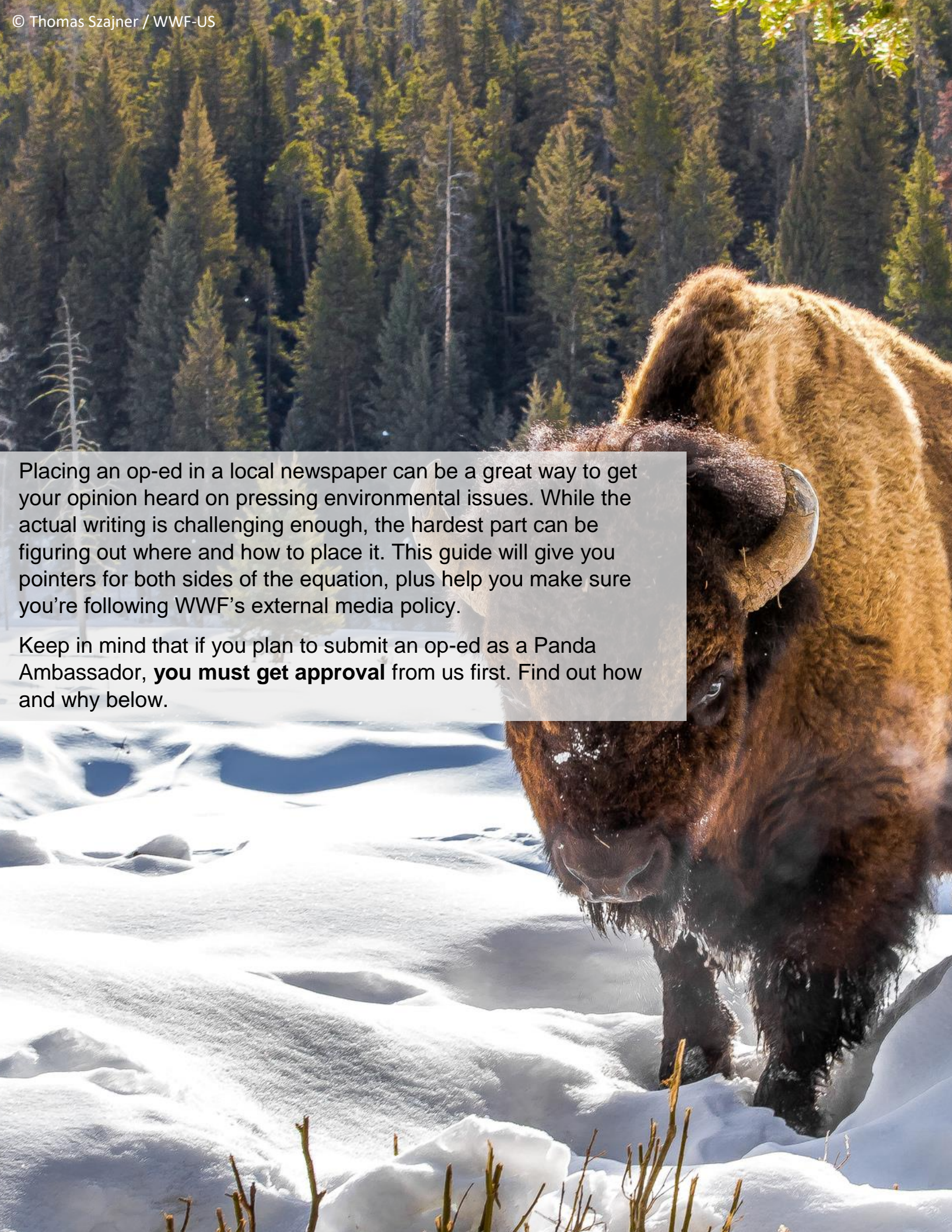




How to

WRITE AND SUBMIT AN OP-ED

Panda Ambassadors



Placing an op-ed in a local newspaper can be a great way to get your opinion heard on pressing environmental issues. While the actual writing is challenging enough, the hardest part can be figuring out where and how to place it. This guide will give you pointers for both sides of the equation, plus help you make sure you're following WWF's external media policy.

Keep in mind that if you plan to submit an op-ed as a Panda Ambassador, **you must get approval** from us first. Find out how and why below.

Part I - Writing

Step 1. Selecting a topic

Op-ed stands for opinion-editorial. The purpose of an op-ed is to persuade others to adopt your view of things or—better yet—to take action on an issue. Choose a topic that you genuinely passionate about. You can write an op-ed about anything you want, but you'll have greater chances of publication if you pick a subject that's either in the news already or can be tied to current events.

It can also help to approach a subject with a hot take or a contrary or unconventional opinion. For example, if you keep reading local news stories about bringing back coal jobs in your region and thinking, “But no, that doesn't make any sense and will actually hurt our local economy in the long run,” you have the perfect ingredients to start writing an op-ed.

When selecting a topic, also think about your role as a Panda Ambassador. Is this a topic that WWF works on or has expertise in? Also consider that WWF is working with several organizations, businesses, and politicians on both ends of the spectrum, all in an effort to help the environment. An article that attacks or bashes these businesses or politicians could potentially hurt our efforts. Disagreements with policy or procedures, presented with civility and backed up by facts, are fine—personal attacks are not.

Also, keep in mind that WWF is a strictly nonpartisan organization. While we advocate around certain issues and legislation, WWF would never endorse a particular candidate or political party. In your official capacity as a Panda Ambassador, you're expected to adhere to that, too. Using your position as Panda Ambassador to try to influence support for a candidate or party is strictly prohibited. In your personal life as a private citizen, you are free to support any candidates or political parties you like—but keep that separate from your role as a Panda Ambassador, just as an employee of WWF would.

This means you would never write an op-ed as a Panda Ambassador about why voters should back X candidate. You could, however, write an article about an environmental issue that's being debated in the election, imploring all candidates to see the importance of taking action.

If you have a hard time understanding the difference between advocating for issues and advocating for candidates, it's best to avoid political topics for your op-ed.

Step 2. Make it locally relevant

As a Panda Ambassador, one of the most important qualities you bring to the table is an intimate knowledge of your own local community—who the people are, what they care about, and what motivates them. Make the best use of that knowledge by writing a piece to influence your local community. WWF already has a centralized team working on articles and op-eds for the major national news outlets, but there's just no way for us to write 100 different pieces about how an issue might impact various communities across the country. That's where you can really help.

While your piece should be written for a local audience, you can still tackle a range of issues, from local to national or global. You just have to explain how those issues will affect the people in your local community, why they should care, and what they can do.

Step 3. Pick a target publication

Decide on the ideal place for your op-ed. This should be your local newspaper, your school newspaper, or a local-interest magazine or blog. If you're in a major media market like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, consider alternative weeklies or blogs instead of the big national papers.

Your op-ed may not end up in your ideal publication, but deciding to target your writing toward a specific outlet will help you in a few ways:

- You can check out previously published op-eds for length, tone, and style. Most op-eds will be around 500 words, but that can vary drastically from publication to publication. Some outlets appreciate snark and humor—others prefer a straightforward, serious account.
- You can follow that outlet's coverage and see what stories they care about to make sure your topic is a good fit.
- You can get an even better idea of your audience by analyzing who would read this publication. Look at the advertisements and other articles to make sure this is really reaching your target audience.

Step 4. Do your research

To make an impact, you'll need more than an opinion—you'll need facts to back it up. Get online and do some research on your topic. Find data and statistics from credible sources that back up what you're saying.

If in your research you encounter something that seems credible and also contradicts your opinion, don't just dismiss it. Investigate further. Maybe it's an outlying or misinterpreted piece of data, or maybe it shows that you don't have your thesis exactly right and need to adjust it. If it's a commonly cited point or statistic, you'll want to address it in your article.

Step 5. Write an outline

Your op-ed should be like a thesis paper, using the same basic formula you've used for persuasive papers in school:

- Start with a strong statement introducing your opinion on a topic. Explain why it matters to your community. Give your thesis statement.
- Next, clarify your point or go deeper into the topic. Explain why a common misconception is incorrect, and why your point of view is correct.
- Follow this with the supporting evidence. Use data, statistics, and anecdotes as appropriate—this is where your research comes in.
- Conclude by summarizing your thesis, reiterating your main points, and providing a call to action.

If you think it might be helpful, give yourself a rough word count for each section in your outline. You can be flexible, but it can also keep you from devoting 400 words of a 500-word op-ed to your introduction. The longest section should be the one with all of your supporting evidence.

Step 6. Write your article

Now fill in the skeleton you outlined in the previous step, being sure to keep your audience in mind. Write directly to them, as if you are explaining your points to a real person. With all your preparation and your strong feelings on the topic, it should flow easily.

Step 7. Edit and sharpen

If you're really passionate about this topic, you probably wrote something way over your target word count. While you may love every word, you're going to have to cut it down. Be merciless—choose only the best material, the strongest evidence, and the best arguments.

Next, spend some time working on your first sentence. If it doesn't grab attention right away, change it to something that does. Be direct, abrupt, contrary, or even shocking—as long as it's still appropriate for your target publication.

Read your piece over again from the point of view of a newcomer to the topic. Does it make sense? Do you understand what the piece wants you to do after reading? If possible, have a friend read your draft. Ask them to summarize it to you and make sure they got the point. If they didn't, go back and revise.

Part II – Submitting your article

Step 1. Contact WWF

Now that you have the perfect piece, send it to WWF to review. You can email your piece to panda.ambassador@wwfus.org. Let us know that you've written an op-ed, what your target publication is, and when you'd like to submit it (if it's time-sensitive).

If you want to submit your piece in your capacity as a WWF Panda Ambassador, Step 1 is required. This allows us to track media interactions with our organization, capitalize on upcoming opportunities and, most important, ensure that all of our messages to the public are consistent and coordinated.

We'll look the piece over and send it to our colleagues in the Media and External Affairs team for feedback. You'll hear from us in a few days and we'll either give you the all-clear to submit or ask you to make some changes, submit it to a different outlet, or refrain from submitting it in your capacity as a Panda Ambassador.

If we ask you not to submit it as an individual who is affiliated with WWF, it doesn't mean we hate it. You may have chosen a topic that WWF doesn't specifically work on and isn't comfortable claiming expertise in. It may be slightly (or significantly) off-message for us. We may just be planning to submit our own national op-ed on the same subject and don't want to compete with ourselves! There are lots of potential reasons. We'll work with you to make sure you understand what factors need to be considered for next time.

Step 2. Submit your op-ed

Once you have the all-clear from WWF, send in your op-ed to the address provided by your target outlet. Send it yourself, from your own email address, in the format requested by the publication. If they don't stipulate, a Word document is fine. In the body of your email, explain that you are a local ambassador for World Wildlife Fund and that you'd like the publication to consider your op-ed for submission.

Most publications will state that any article you submit to them has to be exclusive—meaning you can't send the same article to multiple outlets. However, if they decline to publish your piece, you can then send it to another publication.

Step 3. Keep WWF updated

If your submission is accepted, contact panda.ambassador@wwfus.org and let us know. Share any other information you have—when it will publish, whether it will appear in print or online, or both, etc. Send us a link when it goes live and we'll see if we can promote it. If it's rejected and you plan to submit to another outlet, let us know which outlet.

Step 4. Consider alternative avenues

If your piece is rejected from each of your target publications, don't be discouraged. Here are a few other options to explore:

- **Think smaller.** If a city-wide paper rejected it, maybe a neighborhood blog or a local college newspaper would be interested.
- **Think subject matter.** If you've exhausted all the local options, consider whether there are any publications or blogs specifically devoted to your subject matter. A national blog devoted to the impacts of climate change, for example, might be very interested to see how you think climate change will impact your small town.
- **Publish it yourself.** Consider publishing your op-ed yourself on your own blog or a community blogging site.
- **Hold off.** If the piece isn't tied to a particular current event and will still be relevant at a later date, you can wait and try submitting it to your target publications again in a few months.

Step 5. Share your experience

Log on to the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and share your experience. If your piece is published, share the link and encourage others to do the same. If you're having a hard time getting it placed, you might ask for tips on how to make it more newsworthy or even ideas for publications that are specific to your subject matter. Maybe you hated the whole process and never want to do it again. Or maybe you loved it so much that you've decided to start your own blog. Whatever your experience, let us know!