

**MASS CHAPTER OF THE AAP: ADVOCACY SERIES**

**ADVOCACY THROUGH OP-EDS AND  
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**



**APRIL 2, 2025 WITH DRS. MARY BETH MIOTTO, BRENDA PRING, AND SEAN PALFREY**



## **Disclosures:**

Doctors, Miotto, Pring, and Palfrey have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.

## **Credits:**

The AAP Digital Advocacy Guide

The Massachusetts Medical Society's "Crafting Compelling Voices: Writing and Publishing Impactful Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor" CME

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# KEY CONCEPTS

- ★ **WHY EARNED MEDIA?**
- ★ **WHY ME?**
- ★ **WHAT'S MY MESSAGE?**
- ★ **STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION**

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# Why Me...Or You?



- Pediatricians are trusted by most Americans.
- Pediatricians are accepted experts in child development, child wellbeing and diseases of children.
- Pediatricians are still seen as the most altruistic specialty when we advocate in legislatures.
- Pediatricians partner with families every day, so they have the stories that help the public and influencers understand the issues impacting children and their families.
- Pediatricians are great communicators because we need to explain complex topics to our patients AND the different members of their families.

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# One Pediatrician's Story: Dr. Sean Palfrey



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# What's My Message? How do I Tell the Story?

- Name the problem in ways every reader can understand without a medical degree and tell why it matters (now). Ask yourself “Does anybody care?” and work on explaining WHY they should care.
- Offer a straightforward and brief story with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Always remember to fully deidentify stories.
- Offer one or two action items or solutions.



# Developing a Powerful Message that People Will Hear

From Dr. David Rosman, Past President, Massachusetts Medical Society

<https://content.uplynk.com/player5/fbslmuYHnQ2WlqKXWLtyMsa.html>

<https://www.massmed.org/Continuing-Education-and-Events/Online-CME/Courses/Crafting-Compelling-Voices/Crafting-Compelling-Voices--Writing-and--Publishing-Impactful-Op-Eds-and-Letters-to-the-Editor>

# Telling YOUR Story

From the AAP Digital Advocacy Guide

<https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/ap-advocacy-guide/>

## The Dos and Don'ts of Advocacy Storytelling

### Do:

#### ✓ Have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

This is the fundamental structure of every story. That's because it's as straightforward as it is interesting. Audiences will want to know how your story turns out, ensuring they pay attention.

#### ✓ Use accessible, relatable language.

Convincing is the opposite of confusing. The more easily someone can understand your story, the more impact it will make on them. Tell the story in a way that could be understood by someone without medical expertise.

#### ✓ Give vivid details that bring the story to life.

Paint a picture of the situation. What did you see, hear, or smell? Did anyone say something specific and striking? What was the energy in the room? How did it make you feel?

#### ✓ Protect patient confidentiality.

Your number one duty is to your patients — that's why you became an advocate in the first place. Lift up their voices while keeping them safe.

### Don't:

#### ✗ Get nonlinear or experimental.

What works for novelists doesn't necessarily work for advocates. People shouldn't have to re-read your story to comprehend its meaning.

#### ✗ Use medical jargon or acronyms.

Be considerate of — but not condescending to — your audience. Most of them won't have medical degrees or child health expertise. If the average person would have to look up a word or phrase, it's best not to use it.

#### ✗ Give too much or too little detail.

Concision is key. The right details can engross a listener; too many or too few can leave them feeling impatient, underwhelmed or confused.

#### ✗ Reveal identifying personal information.

Always anonymize your story. Never reveal details, like names or employers, that could help someone identify the people in your story — whether they're your patient, or another civilian.



# Mapping Your Message

## Message map example

### 1

#### Measles is dangerous

- 1a Measles kills. It is one of the leading causes of death among young children in the world. 1-3 in every 1000 infected individuals will die [Red Book 2015, data from the US].
- 1b The complications of the disease can lead to pneumonia, blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, ear infections or severe respiratory infections.
- 1c In 2013, there were almost 150 000 measles deaths globally – about 400 deaths every day or 16 deaths every hour.

### 2

#### The campaign is necessary

- 2a Our country has taken steps to avoid a future outbreak of measles by initiating a measles vaccination campaign.
- 2b The target group chosen for vaccination is the 15-19-year-olds in all 16 regions. The campaign intends to cover at least 80% of 1.2 million teenagers in this age group.
- 2c Not enough people are immune and in 2014 our country reported more measles cases than in previous years. There have been pockets where the coverage has not been as high and it seems some people have been missed.

### 3

#### The vaccine is safe

- 3a The vaccine saves lives and prevents suffering. The risk of severe side effects is minimal. Some mild and more frequent side effects that may occur include a light rash and fever. 1 in 1 000 000 individual who are vaccinated with measles vaccine may suffer from a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).
- 3b The measles vaccine procured for use in this campaign is very safe and very effective. It was produced in the State Serum Institute in India. It has been used in 45 countries around the world over the past few years, including the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the Netherlands.
- 3c The vaccine is pre-qualified, which means it has been approved by WHO. Before pre-qualification it was rigorously tested through clinical and field procedures. After pre-qualification, WHO regularly inspects the production facilities to ensure compliance with good manufacturing practice.

# What Topics Need Pediatrician Voices? Dr. Brenda Anders Pring



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# The Nuts and Bolts of Physician Opinion Pieces

- Who is your audience and where is the best outlet for your opinion? Metrowest Daily News, Boston Globe, STAT, NEJM “Perspectives”.
- Timing is critical. You will have better chance of publication when you respond to events in your community quickly. If you have a few paragraphs “ready”, you can build the rest quickly.
- Does the outlet accept “pitches”? Can you get help with your pitch?
- Know the rules:
  - Number of words
  - Do you send as an attachment or within the body of the email?
  - Can you send it to multiple outlets?
  - What key pieces of information do you need to include?
- Check in with your employer’s/institution’s Communications Office.



# Know your target outlet. Study their guide



## Submit an Op-Ed

Updated December 26, 2019, 2:35 p.m.



Op-ed pieces (literally, opposite the editorial page) represent the views of individual columnists and contributing writers. Unlike the editorial page, these columns does not reflect the institutional views of the Globe. They are an opportunity for the Globe to reflect the diverse views of people in the community –and viewpoints may be presented that run counter to the Globe Editorial Board’s position.

The Boston Globe welcomes unsolicited op-ed offerings. Please keep the piece to 700 words and send by e-mail to [oped@globe.com](mailto:oped@globe.com), by fax to 617-929-2098, or by mail to:

Op-ed Editor, The Boston Globe

Here are general guidelines for First Opinion articles:

- We are looking for crisp essays that offer intriguing opinion or perspective that will be of interest to STAT’s readers. Writing about a topic immediately in the news or with a provocative perspective is a plus, as are first-person stories with a broad or universal message.
- Please write in a conversational style for a general audience.
- We like to see some first person narrative fairly high in the article (“My work helping draft new guidelines for prescribing opioids has given me a bird’s-eye view of ...” or “As the founder of a biotech startup, I ...”). Personal stories are even better. Establishing a personal connection between the writer and the topic lets readers know the writer’s standing for expounding on the topic at hand.
- Shorter is better than longer: 900 to 1,000 words is the sweet spot.
- We cap the number of authors at three.

From Massachusetts Medical Society’s:  
Crafting Compelling Voices: Writing and Publishing Impactful Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor:

# What's Next?

Start and maintain a file or notebook with your ideas about topics that incite passion. Write down stories that pertain to this topic and develop a story bank. That story bank will serve you in your writing or in visits to legislators .

Use Google Alerts to let you know of news or mention of your topic of interest so you can respond quickly. Timing matters.

Consider creating a small circle of fellow pediatricians who can hold you accountable, offer encouragement, and critique your writing.

Consider taking the Massachusetts Medical Society's on demand course: "[Crafting Compelling Voices: Writing and Publishing Impactful Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor](#)"

Check out the AAP's [Digital Advocacy Toolkit](#).

Give the Chapter feedback on whether you would like more opportunities to grow your skills. We can make it happen.



# Google Alerts: Get Notified of News Stories on your Topics of Interest:

The screenshot shows the Google Alerts interface. At the top left is the Google logo. Below it, the word "Alerts" is displayed in a large font, with the subtitle "Monitor the web for interesting new content" underneath. A search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the text "Create an alert about..." is positioned below the subtitle. The main content area is titled "My alerts (6)" and features a settings gear icon on the right. Below this title, there is a list of four alerts, each with a name and two icons (a pencil for editing and a trash can for deleting):

- autism
- measles
- school health in Massachusetts
- vaccine requirements

<https://www.google.com/alerts>

Crafting Compelling Voices:  
Writing and Publishing  
Impactful Op-Eds and  
Letters to the Editor:  
from Massachusetts Medical  
Society

Module 1: Topics, Relevancy and  
Content Development Strategies

Module 2: Organizing Thoughts to  
Create Impact and Drive Change  
Through Media Amplification

Module 3: Maneuvering in Today's  
Media Environment

Module 4: Strategic Placement and  
Maximizing Opportunity

<https://www.massmed.org/Continuing-Education-and-Events/Online-CME/Courses/Crafting-Compelling-Voices/Crafting-Compelling-Voices--Writing-and--Publishing-Impactful-Op-Eds-and-Letters-to-the-Editor/>

## Where Does Social Media Fit In?

Traditional media versus social media:

- Audiences may Differ
- How long does the message stay out front?
- What is your purpose?
- Use social media to amplify traditional earned media.
- Sometimes showing that a topic is trending on social media is a way to get traditional media editors hooked.



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## One Voice Vs A Chorus

Join in Chapter Advocacy Efforts to:

- Learn More
- Do More
- Make More Music/Noise

...Together Our Voices Are More Powerful.



# Tomorrow is the starting point...

From the AAP Digital Advocacy Guide at <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/aap-advocacy-guide/op-ed-brainstorm-tool/>

The screenshot shows the 'Op-ed Brainstorm Tool' interface on the AAP website. At the top, the AAP logo and navigation links are visible. The main heading is 'Op-ed Brainstorm Tool'. Below the heading, there is a 'Save' button and a text input field for the user to describe their health issue. The form contains several questions with radio button options:

- What child health issue do you want to write about?
- Is this a national level issue or specific to your state/community?
  - National level issue
  - Specific to your state/community
  - Not sure
- Does your op-ed have a news hook that makes it relevant and newsworthy right now?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
- Do you know the main 1-2 key points you want to address in your op-ed?
  - Yes
  - No
- Do you have a compelling personal or patient stories and perspectives can you use to humanize the issue?
  - Yes
  - No
- Do you have a call to action? Do you know what you want lawmakers or community members to do about your issue?
  - Yes
  - No
- Have you thought about the target news outlet to pitch your piece to?
  - Yes
  - No

At the bottom, there is a progress bar and two buttons: 'Previous step' and 'Next step'.

And there are so many tools....and so many people to help.....

From the AAP Digital Advocacy Guide:  
<https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/aap-advocacy-guide/op-ed-brainstorm-tool/>

## Op-ed Brainstorm Checklist

You've completed the first step of your op-ed drafting process – the initial brainstorm! Based on how you responded, below is a checklist to help guide you on next steps. If you'd like, you can print this checklist and refer to it as you make progress. You can also save it as a PDF by clicking print and then "Save to PDF."

- You have an issue in mind, which is a great first step! Start thinking about the other elements that would make an op-ed on this topic compelling, timely and newsworthy.
- Learn more about your AAP state chapter's advocacy on this issue. As a start, visit your chapter's website: <https://www.aap.org/en/community/chapter-websites/>. You can also email [kids1st@aap.org](mailto:kids1st@aap.org) to share your interest in writing an op-ed and we can point you in the right direction.
- A news hook is one of the most important elements of your piece. Make the news hook clear from the beginning of your draft, so that readers understand why this issue is important right now.
- Start outlining the 1-2 key points you'd like to make in your piece. Remember – this is not a research paper! Keep your writing concise and avoid jargon. If you have any relevant data, pick the most powerful point or two to include.
- Visit the [Advocacy Guide section on storytelling](#), which provides helpful tips on how to tell a compelling patient story or personal anecdote that supports your advocacy. Your word count is limited in an op-ed – so keep that in mind!
- Be sure to end your op-ed with a strong call to action. The key points that you cover throughout your op-ed should support your ask and illustrate why change or action is needed.
- Check the website for the outlet you are hoping to pitch. Most news outlets have information there on opinion submission requirements, including word count.
- Get to know your target news outlet's opinion pages. Have they covered this issue recently? Or, have they published another similar op-ed that might lessen the chances of yours getting picked up?

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No matter where you are in the op-ed brainstorming or drafting process, email [kids1st@aap.org](mailto:kids1st@aap.org) with any questions. The AAP media team can provide further guidance to help support your op-ed writing efforts!

Print

Previous step

Next step

What Do our Guests Think Is  
the Most Important Thing to  
Know about Opinion Pieces?

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# Questions and Answers

# More resources

- 5 tips for medical students looking to get an op-ed published  
<https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/medical-school-life/5-tips-medical-students-looking-get-op-ed-published>
- Why physicians need to write (KevinMD.com/MedPage Today)  
<https://www.kevinmd.com/2013/05/physicians-write-2.html>
- Letters to the Editor & Opinion Pieces (American College of Emergency Physicians): <http://www.acep.org/get-involved/becoming-a-spokesperson/speak-out/letters-to-the-editor-opinion-pieces>

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