

How to Write an Op-Ed

This guide will help you turn your passion for nature into words that move people.

What Is an Op-Ed?

An op-ed (short for "opposite the editorial page") is a short, opinion-based piece written by someone outside a publication's staff. It's your voice, your perspective, grounded in something you care about — and it's one of the most powerful tools for public advocacy.

Op-eds reach people who might not follow conservation organizations or attend community events. They humanize complex issues. And when they're written by artists, community members, or people with lived experience — they land differently than anything a scientist or politician could write.

A published op-ed can:

- **Shift public opinion** by humanizing an issue through personal story
- **Put pressure on decision-makers** by demonstrating community concern
- **Spark conversations** in living rooms, coffee shops, and comment sections
- **Establish you** as a credible, caring voice in your community

The Structure of a Strong Op-Ed

Think of your op-ed like a campfire: you need a spark to catch attention, fuel to build understanding, and a lasting warmth that people carry home. Here's how each section works:

1. The Hook (1–2 sentences)

Open with something that stops the reader cold. A vivid image. A surprising fact. A personal moment. Don't start with "I think" or "In today's world." Start with something that makes them feel something.

Try this:

"Last spring, I watched a meadowlark sing from a fence post near my studio. I didn't know then that I might be one of the last people to see one there."

2. The Problem (1–2 paragraphs)

What is happening, and why does it matter? Be specific. Use one concrete example or piece of data. Don't try to cover everything — pick one thing and make it real for your reader.

Ask yourself:

What is the one thing I most want my reader to understand?

What local or specific detail makes this feel real and close to home?

3. Your Perspective (1–2 paragraphs)

Why are YOU writing this? What do you know, feel, or see that others might not? This is where your identity as an artist, a community member, a person who loves this land becomes your credibility. Use it. Your personal connection is not a weakness — it's what makes the piece matter.

4. The Call to Action (1 paragraph)

What do you want the reader to do, feel, or think differently about? Be direct. Give them a next step.

Examples:

- Contact your MLA about protecting species-at-risk habitat
- Support the 30x30 commitment to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030
- Keep your cat indoors to protect songbirds
- Show up to the next public hearing on land use in your area

5. The Closing Line

End with something that stays with the reader. Circle back to your opening image, or leave them with a question that lingers. The last sentence is what they'll remember.

Practical Tips

Length

600–800 words is the sweet spot for most local and regional publications. That’s roughly one page of double-spaced text.

Tone

Write like you talk. Clear, honest, personal. Avoid jargon. If you wouldn’t say it out loud at a dinner party, don’t put it in your op-ed.

Local angle

Editors want pieces that feel relevant to their readers. Name the place, the river, the neighbourhood, the species. Local specificity is what makes a regional piece publishable.

One idea

Don’t try to say everything. Say one thing well. If you find yourself covering five different issues, you’re writing five different op-eds. Pick one and go deep.

Pitch before you write

Many publications want a short pitch first — 2–3 sentences on what you’d write and why you’re the person to write it. This saves you from writing something a publication has already covered.

Where to Submit

Start local, then think bigger:

Local & Regional

- Castanet
- Kelowna Capital News
- Penticton Western News
- Summerland Review

BC & National

- The Narwhal (accepts community voices on conservation topics)
- The Tye (open to community perspectives)
- Vancouver Sun / Province (higher bar, but worth pitching for big moments)

Your Own Platforms

Don't underestimate your own channels. A thoughtful Instagram caption, a personal blog post, or a letter to your local council can reach people just as meaningfully as a newspaper — and sometimes more.

A Real Example: Published in the Vancouver Sun

Below is an [op-ed co-written by Dr. Sarah Otto and Brynna Kagawa-Visentin and published in the Vancouver Sun](#) on International Biodiversity Day. The table breaks down exactly what each section is doing so you can see the structure in action.

Published: *Vancouver Sun | Opinion*

Title: *"Biodiversity Is the Foundation of a Stronger BC — It's Time We Treated It That Way"*

SECTION	FROM THE PUBLISHED OP-ED	WHAT IT'S DOING
HOOK	<i>As inflation, rising tariffs, and economic instability grow, BC faces pressure to make short-term economic decisions. But in times like these, we must remember what truly sustains us: healthy ecosystems, brimming with the biodiversity that makes BC special.</i>	Meets readers where they are (the economy) before pivoting to the real subject. Creates immediate relevance for a mainstream audience.
DEFINE THE TERM	<i>Biodiversity is the variety of life in our ecosystems — plants, animals, fungi, and even microorganisms — that work together to provide vital services like clean air, fresh water, food, medicine, and protection from floods, fires, and drought.</i>	Defines the key term clearly, without being condescending. Assumes intelligence, not prior knowledge.
THE PROBLEM	<i>Too often, biodiversity is treated as an optional extra. Something to protect only when convenient. In reality, healthy ecosystems, rich with life, are the foundation of a resilient economy, healthy communities, and long-term security.</i>	Names the problem directly. Short, punchy sentences create urgency. Reframes biodiversity as economic necessity, not just environmental nicety.
LOCAL PRIDE + STAKES	<i>Here in BC, biodiversity is core to our identity. It shapes our culture, our sense of place, our well-being, and many economic livelihoods. People travel from around the world to experience the wonder we're fortunate to live alongside: the leap of orcas, the flight of eagles, and the growl of grizzlies.</i>	Anchors the piece in place and identity. Vivid, specific imagery (orcas, eagles, grizzlies) makes it feel real. Appeals to pride before fear.

THE DATA	<i>BC is the most biodiverse province in Canada, home to over 50,000 species of plants and animals. But nearly 2,000 species, subspecies, and ecosystems are listed as at-risk.</i>	One striking fact followed by a sobering contrast. This is all the data you need. More would dilute the impact.
ROOT CAUSE	<i>Habitat loss, driven by unsustainable resource extraction, urban development, and climate change, is the primary cause of biodiversity loss. And unlike many other provinces, BC still has no standalone law that protects biodiversity.</i>	Moves from problem to cause. The legislative gap is the editorial angle — the specific thing the piece wants changed.
REAL CONSEQUENCES	<i>We did not act in time to save the South Selkirk mountain caribou herd. We have failed the Northern Spotted Owls, with only one female remaining in the wild as of 2023.</i>	Concrete, specific losses. Not abstract statistics — named species, known places. This is where the emotional weight lands.
ECONOMIC CASE	<i>Sectors that power our economy, like nature-based tourism (which generates over \$22 billion annually in BC), fisheries, forestry, agriculture, and even real estate, all depend on healthy, functioning ecosystems.</i>	Circles back to economics — the hook's framing — to close the argument. Bridges values and self-interest.
THE ASK	<i>BC needs a dedicated biodiversity law — one that identifies and protects threatened species and ecosystems, ensures transparency and accountability, and is developed in meaningful partnership with First Nations.</i>	The call to action is specific and policy-level. Not just 'do something' but 'here is the thing.' Includes reconciliation as essential, not add-on.
THE CLOSE	<i>We protect ourselves by protecting nature.</i>	Seven words. The whole argument, distilled. This is the sentence people will remember and share.

Your Turn: A Starter Template

Use this as a jumping-off point. Don't fill in the blanks mechanically — let your own voice take over once you get going.

HOOK — Start with a moment, image, or surprising fact

"Last [season], I [did/saw/noticed] something that stopped me cold..."

THE PROBLEM — What is happening and why does it matter?

Name the issue. Add one specific local detail or piece of data.

"Here in [place], we are facing..."

YOUR PERSPECTIVE — Why are YOU the one writing this?

Your background, your art, your lived experience. This is your credibility.

"As an artist / community member / person who has lived here for X years, I..."

THE ASK — What do you want the reader to do?

Be direct. Give them one clear next step.

"Here's what you can do: [contact your MLA / sign the petition / come to the meeting]"

THE CLOSE — Leave them with something that lingers

Circle back to your opening. Or distill everything into one unforgettable sentence.

"We protect ourselves by protecting nature." is seven words. Yours might be fewer.

Need Help?

Brynna is available for one-on-ones to help you find your angle, workshop a draft, figure out where to submit, or just talk through what you want to say. Email her:

[Brynna Kagawa-Visentin](mailto:Brynna.Kagawa-Visentin)

And remember: the goal isn't perfection. The goal is for your voice to be heard. You already have the most important thing — something you genuinely care about.