

Writing Op-Eds
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Telling Your Story & Perspective: Writing Op-Eds

- * Mainstream newspapers are still the most significant, common source of information for the American public.
- * When mobile, online and e-platforms are factored in, **more than 100 million people read newspapers every day and that number rises to more than 130 million for Sunday editions.**
- * Online news sites overwhelmingly rely on mainstream newspapers as their primary source for content (60%).
- * Almost 80% of newspaper readers review the op-ed page.

The Progressive Media Project's "Voices of Diversity" amplifies the voices of minorities, immigrants, and social justice activists, reflecting their perspectives on important issues of the day. see: <http://progressivemediaproject.org>

**Please email me if you are interested in
submitting something!**
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An undocumented immigrant speaks out

By **Angelica Velazquillo**

I am an undocumented immigrant. This month, I and nine other undocumented young people were arrested in Charlotte, N.C., after staging a sit-in that stopped traffic at a busy downtown intersection.

Our goal is education, not deportation, for undocumented students.

Ours is a movement that started in Arizona and then spread to California, Georgia, and North Carolina. This movement is not going away.

Although President Obama has promised change, his administration is deporting people at a faster rate than the Bush administration did.

We are tired of waiting for change. We are tired of seeing families torn apart. So we took action.

When my family moved here, I was 4 years old, and my brother was 2. When we got older, we realized that going to college and living as everyone else does would be difficult. I graduated from college, but my brother hasn't been able to complete his education.

In many states, including mine, more anti-immigration laws are being passed.

So we spent three days in jail to challenge a system that has deported nearly a million people in the last three years. We were willing to be sent to a federal detention center, but because of all the publicity surrounding our protest, we were released. I guess officials want to pretend nothing happened.

Although we still face criminal charges, the government has

dropped our deportation orders. This, however, prevents us from challenging our immigration status and applying for work permits. Despite our academic accomplishments, community involvement, and all our hard work, we have been left in limbo again.

Some say we are not Americans. But our civil disobedience shows how much we love this country and how American we are. Like the activists of the civil rights movement, we are standing up for our ideals, and we are willing to sacrifice.

We want to be citizens. We want opportunities, not deportations.

Angelica Velazquillo is a graduate of Belmont Abbey College, near Charlotte. She wrote this for the Progressive Media Project, and it was distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.



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Obama shouldn't count Florida out

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By Glenn Hutchinson, May 30, 2012



The Democratic Party shouldn't write off Florida yet.

While President Obama is trailing Mitt Romney in Florida 47 percent to 41 percent in the latest Quinnipiac poll, Republicans in the Sunshine State are damaging their brand.

Tea party-backed Florida Gov. Rick Scott is the least popular governor in America. The more extreme his legislation, the lower his approval ratings.

Scott has cut millions from health and human services and billions from education. At the same time, his policies have benefited big business. Luckily, many of his initiatives have been blocked.



For example, Scott wanted to privatize the prison system, a potential cash cow for corporations. But after a public outcry over the expense and loss of jobs, he was stopped.

Also, Scott signed a law that mandated drug testing for anyone receiving welfare. Courts halted the program as they examine its constitutionality, including Scott's plan to randomly drug test state employees.

Other Florida Republicans have been as extreme.

Rep. Allen West, R-Fla., has alleged that up to 80 Democratic members of Congress are communists.

Rep. Sandy Adams, R-Fla., sponsored a House bill to amend the Violence Against Women Act to punish immigrant women who report domestic abuse. They could end up being deported if they are undocumented.

And then there's the tea party star, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., who may be on Romney's short list of possible running mates. Although some hope he could appeal to Latino voters, Rubio supports racial profiling laws like Arizona's SB 1070.

Florida now has 29 electoral votes, up from 27 in the last presidential election because of its increased population. This is too big a prize for the Obama campaign to forsake.

Because of the extremism washing over the state, Obama may be able to win Florida again. And that would make his re-election bid all the easier.

Glenn Hutchinson is a professor at Florida International University in Miami. He can be reached at pmproi@progressive.org (<mailto:pmproi@progressive.org>)

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COMMENTARY

All we want is a chance

Florida revoked my scholarship because I am undocumented, and I can't afford out-of-state tuition.

By Nicolas Wulff
MCT Information Services

I'm an undocumented student who wants to be in the college classroom.

I've lived in Miami for 17 years and am attending Florida International University. But because I'm undocumented, my tuition is supposed to cost \$1,239 more per class than a "regular" student.

My mom always stressed how vital an education is. I followed her advice. I graduated from high school with a 3.8 GPA and received a

Florida Bright Futures Scholarship.

However, Florida revoked my scholarship because of my undocumented status, and I can't afford the out-of-state tuition. I am also denied federal financial aid.

Some other students and I applied for a waiver from Florida International. If it doesn't go through, we will be out of luck.

I'm by no means alone in this predicament. Only 5 percent of the 65,000 graduating undocumented high school seniors in the United States each year can go to college.

Undocumented students should not be charged higher tuition for college. Our broken immigration system prevents undocumented youth from reaching their potential and categorizes us as second-class citizens.

Some argue in-state tuition should be for only tax-paying citizens, but undocumented people pay taxes too. According to the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy, undocumented families paid an estimated \$11.2 billion in taxes last year.

Thirteen states offer in-state tuition for undocumented students, and some colleges, like Florida International, sometimes grant in-state tuition waivers or help find private scholarships.

But most states and most colleges do not. They are wasting the talent of so many young people. All we want is a chance to better not only ourselves, but America too.

Nicolas Wulff is a 21-year-old undocumented student who has lived in Miami since the age of 5.

Printing imperfections present during scanning



The PROGRESSIVE MEDIA PROJECT

Writing Successful Op-eds: The Fundamentals

STRUCTURE

1. Write a strong lede (Opening statement)
 - a) Find the "news peg." What makes your subject relevant, topical, and of interest or importance for the audience at the time it is being read? Anniversaries, current events, historical commemoration, emerging issues, are all possible sources for your news peg. If you are looking to connect your topic to a date or anniversary in history, anniversaries ending in "0" (10th, 20th, etc.) or "5" (25th, 35th, etc.) often work out well.
 - b) Make sure the first two sentences are short and to the point: you want to convey subject + attitude/ point of view. The opening sentence should never be more than 15-20 words long.
 - c) Most editors will only read through the first couple of sentences to make their determination on publication. The simplicity, strength and directness of your lede are very important.
 2. Defend your position with two or three arguments. Be sure they are clear and separate points. Use signposts (enumeration or words like "next," "also," etc.) to help your reader with your reasoning structure and logic.
 3. Rebut the obvious counterarguments, especially if there are well-known or familiar objections to your position.
 4. Don't try to do too much. Don't introduce new subject matter in the second to last paragraph. If you feel compelled to include excessive detail or lengthy explanations, you might want to reconsider your lede and narrow it down further. Or, perhaps you really have material for more than one op-ed.
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5. End on a strong note. Appeal to the readers' highest values.
6. Be conscious of editorial and publication deadlines. Find out when your draft is needed and get it in on time. Be especially conscious of deadlines when you are writing about something that is tied closely to a specific date (The 25th anniversary of).

WRITING TIPS

1. Overcoming writer's block:
 - a) Check your ego at the door.
 - b) Don't wait for the muse: it might not arrive on time or ever. Start writing, and keep writing. Once you have something on paper or on your computer screen, you can start working with it and you will find direction and even inspiration.
 - c) Writer's block is thinker's block. Outlines will help you. Don't burden yourself with formal outlines with enumeration, indentation, etc.. Allow yourself to think broadly, draw connections, find associations, and put down ideas, fragments of ideas, impressions and thoughts, facts, any and all possibilities. You might be surprised at where your outline takes you.
 2. Use short sentences and small words. In op-eds, a paragraph can be one sentence.
 3. Use active, not passive tense.
 4. Avoid categoricals: first, last, always, never, best, worst, most, etc. These tend to get overused, are often not entirely true, and can damage the credibility of your argument or position if someone can point out that your example is in fact not the first, last, etc..
 5. Feel free to start sentences with "and" and "but," no matter what your English teachers told you.
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6. Shun academic and other "in-group" jargon. For example: "problematic," hegemonic," "zeitgeist," "indeed." Jargon can be

puzzling to folks who don't understand it, confusing if people misunderstand it, and it can sound pompous.

7. Trim adjectives and adverbs. For example: "Dashed quickly" (Is there any other way to dash?)
 8. Don't get overheated – "preposterous," "outrageous," "unconscionable," "fascistic."
 9. Read it aloud after you are done. The ear often picks up or critiques differently what the eye reads.
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The PROGRESSIVE MEDIA PROJECT

Op-ed Writing Clinic

Six Types of Op-eds

1. DECLARATIVE

This is the most basic, or common, type of op-ed.
Policy X is bad. Here's why.

Example: Yolanda Chavez Leyva on landlords and immigration enforcement
"Landlords should not serve as agents of the immigration service."

Example: Jenigh Garrett on citizens without ID losing health care, voting rights
"The same policies that are preventing poor and minority citizens from receiving health care benefits could also prevent many of them from voting. This is wrong and it restricts democracy."

Example: David Love on affirmative action at U. of Michigan
"The University of Michigan's recent decision to suspend affirmative action was a defeat for those who value diversity in higher education."

Example: David Moberg on the need for American worker unions
"In January, President Bush finally acknowledged a problem that many people have long recognized: Economic inequality has been rising for more than a quarter century, and the average American worker is not sharing in the nation's economic gains."

Example: Amina Mire on ending the crisis in Somalia
"The Bush administration should not be supporting an illegal Ethiopian invasion and occupation of Somalia."

2. FIRST-PERSON

The writer speaks from personal experience on an issue. Be careful, though. The piece needs to come to a point. Show how what happened to you makes the case for the policy change you advocate.

Example: Mike Ervin on Medicare Part D's coverage gap
"My friend Barb has multiple sclerosis. Last year, she signed up for prescription drug coverage under Medicare Part D, but she still had to pay so much of her own money for medication at the end of the year that she was broke."

Example: Yolanda Chavez Leyva on making college affordable for students
"College affordability is a big deal. Just ask my students. I teach at a university where 75 percent of the students work to put themselves through school."

Example: Steven Choi on Korean American invisibility

"A few weeks have passed since Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people at Virginia Tech, and many of us are still dealing with the shock, horror and grief. As a Korean American, I see in this controversy signs for continuing concern – but also reasons for hope."

3. HOLIDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, AND BIRTHDAYS/OBITUARIES

Choose a current holiday, anniversary, birthday, or obituary of an important figure as a peg to talk about a current issue.

Example: Holiday: Norma Mena and Silvia Proano on labor conditions for flower workers

"This Mother's Day, we hope you will consider the situation of the women who have worked to produce the beautiful roses that you buy."

Example: Anniversary: Clarence Lusane on September 11

"This marks the fourth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, and no amount of White House spin can hide the ugly truth of its mounting record of calamities."

Example: Anniversary: Ed Morales on U.S. citizenship for Puerto Rico

"March 2 marks the 90th anniversary of the Jones Act, which conferred U.S. citizenship on all citizens of Puerto Rico. This has been both a blessing and a curse."

Example: Birthday: Andrea Lewis on Rosa Parks

"Today marks the 90th birthday of Rosa Parks, the mother of the civil-rights movement."

Example: Observance: Dr. Jennifer Mieres on women and heart disease

"February is American Heart Month, and it serves as an important reminder of the need to address the impact of heart disease on women."

Example: Commemorative: Salim Muwakkil on honoring Frederick Douglass

"As Black History Month comes to a close, let's take a moment to honor Frederick Douglass, the father of the civil rights movement and the most influential black American of the 19th century."

4. SOLUTIONS

Choose a current topic, and sketch solutions to the problem. "Here's how to solve the nation's health crisis..."

Example: Premilla Nadasen on funding Head Start

"The Bush administration must increase funding for Head Start and Early Head Start programs if it is serious about not leaving any child behind."

Example: Brian Gilmore on African American opposition to the Iraq War

"African Americans need to get more active in opposing the war in Iraq."

Example: Sarah Anderson on CEO pay

"Now that everyone from George Bush to Ralph Nader agrees that CEOs make too much money, it's time to talk about what to do about it."

Example: Andrew Gunther on congress raising fuel economy standards

"Congress should act now to protect the environment, enhance national security and save consumers money. It can do this when legislators meet to reconcile House and Senate energy bills, if they require our cars and trucks to go farther on a gallon of gas."

5. POPULAR CULTURE

Use something in current pop culture to make a link to a social problem or issue.

Example: Jack Shaheen on image of U.S. Arabs, Muslims

"Fox's '24' is giving a new twist to its old standby: anti-Arab and anti-Muslim themes. This time around, dark-complexioned Americans are the villains."

Example: Mike Ervin on the representation of people with disabilities in movies

"The documentary 'Murderball' is more than just a great action-packed sports movie."

Example: Andrea Lewis on the NFL's color barrier

"Super Bowl XLI has made history before it even begun. No NFL team with an African-American head coach has ever squared off in the biggest sporting event of the year. But this year, both Super Bowl teams are led by black head coaches."

Example: Juleyka Lantigua on encouraging Latino filmmaking

"This year's Academy Awards could easily be called 'The Latino Oscars.' Latino filmmakers have been nominated across several categories, and that's cause for celebration. It's also the perfect time to encourage more Latinos to get in front of, and behind, the camera."

6. QUESTION AND ANSWER/MYTH VS. REALITY

Use this format to educate people about an issue that's not so well known.

Example: Rahul Mahajan on Iraq

"The recent Senate hearings on Iraq are a missed opportunity to explode four myths about Iraq."

Example: Joseph Cirincione on Iran's nuclear capability (Washington Post)

"Iran's expanding nuclear program poses one of the Obama administration's most vexing foreign policy challenges. Fortunately the conditions for containing Tehran's efforts may be better today than they have been in years [T]he prospects for developing a strategy with a solid change of success improve if we dispose of five persistent myths about Iran's nuclear program."