



Share Your Peace Corps Experience

Peace Corps Volunteers have a unique opportunity to strengthen Americans' understanding of the world and its people. By sharing their Peace Corps experience and host country culture, returned and current Volunteers, as well as Peace Corps friends and family, can support the Peace Corps Third Goal: to help Americans understand the people and cultures of other countries.

Service in the Peace Corps is a life-defining, hands-on leadership experience that offers Volunteers the opportunity to make a lasting difference in the lives of others. Volunteers tackle the most pressing needs of people around the world and promote a better understanding between Americans and the people they serve. When they return home, Volunteers bring their knowledge and experiences - and a global outlook - that enrich the lives of those around them.

The Peace Corps Third Goal asks currently serving and returned Volunteers to educate fellow Americans about other cultures, illustrate how important it is to serve those in need, and underscore how relevant the work of the Peace Corps continues to be. Submitting an op-ed or letter to the editor to your local publication is a great way to share your Peace Corps experience.

Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor

What is an op-ed?

An op-ed is an article that is published opposite a newspaper's editorial page and designed to express an opinion.

What is a letter to the editor?

A letter to the editor is a shorter opinion article focused on one main point, often in response to or advocating for something specific.

Tips for Writing

Have a news hook: Tie your article to an upcoming local event, a key date or holiday, or a current story in the news to make it timely and relevant and increase your chances of getting published.

Choose a tone: Opinion articles can be satirical, light-hearted, or serious but should appeal to a broad audience.

Take a stand: Opinion articles are designed to express a specific opinion, such as why volunteer service is important. As a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, writing an opinion article is a great way to share your service experience and explain to others how your service has impacted your life. Take a position on an issue and provide personal testimonial to back it up. Avoid the tendency to give extensive background or outline other viewpoints.

Draw the reader in: Grab the reader's attention by using a dramatic description or making a bold statement in your introduction. Reinforce this point again at the end. The opening and conclusion are the most important sections of your article.

Consider timing: Timing is crucial. Most editors assign and choose opinion articles weeks before publishing, so submit your article in advance. For a back-to-school themed article, for example, a September placement is ideal, so an August submission would be best. Many publications have an editorial calendar you can review to align the timing of your submission with their editorial plans.

Keep it brief: Stick to the word lengths suggested by editors. Generally newspaper op-eds run between 600-800 words, and letters to the editor run between 200-300 words. However, specific newspapers may ask for different lengths. (In Microsoft Word, check your word count by selecting "Tools" and then "Word Count"). Editors reserve the right to edit your article, so stick to the length suggested to help ensure your message gets across as you intend it.

Avoid jargon: Writing an opinion article is very different from academic writing or writing for the web. Opinion articles often appear in general publications designed for all audiences. Use simple language and avoid acronyms.

Understand your audience: Be familiar with the publication before you send your article. Read op-eds and letters to the editor published by the paper you would like to reach ahead of time.

Use examples: Photos, anecdotes, and personal stories are persuasive tools, so include them when possible. They help bring your words to life.

Submitting Your Article

The best way to send your opinion article is almost always via email with the text embedded in the body of the email. Do not send attachments unless specifically requested. In your submission, note the author's full name, phone number, and city/state.

Most newspapers list the submission email address for op-eds and letters on their website's Opinion or Editorial page. If you can't find it, call the outlet's newsroom and ask for the best way to submit the article. Be sure to send it to the right person or department, or it may never be read.

Many outlets require exclusive submissions, meaning you can send your article to only one newspaper at a time. This is frequently noted on the website's Opinion or Editorial page along with a timeframe upon which you can submit to another outlet if you haven't received a reply. In these cases, include a note in your submission that you are offering your op-ed to that newspaper exclusively. If you haven't heard back by the specified timeframe, call and follow up to ensure your op-ed has been received. If it was received, you can move on and try another outlet.

Op-Ed Format

Op-eds are as individual as the writer, and you can use that to your advantage. Focus on one main point, and back up that point with facts and anecdotes.

Think of an op-ed as a convincing essay you wrote in school: It needs an introduction (thesis), a body (support of the thesis), and a conclusion.

Be sure to include a short paragraph (1-2 sentences) at the bottom of your op-ed with biographical information and your credentials (such as the year you graduated from school, if sending to an alumni publication, and where/when you served as a Peace Corps Volunteer). Be sure to include your contact information so the editorial staff can verify your submission.

Introduction

Nothing is more important than grabbing readers' attention from the start. There are many ways to do this, including the use of an engaging question, a personal anecdote, a detailed description, or a relevant example. Then very quickly get to your main point and state it clearly.

Body

Once you've made your point, back it up with facts, figures, stories and examples. Include a story from your personal experience and connect it back to your main point - and even better - relate it to your audience. Strong support of your main point is essential to getting published.

Conclusion

Restate your main point and explain why you feel your point of view is important for the reader. End with a bang by using an engaging quote, posing a thoughtful question, or requesting a specific action. Make it memorable.

See an example of an op-ed here: [Global Service in the 21st Century](#)

Letter to the Editor Format

Letters to the editor follow the same basic structure as an op-ed but are significantly more condensed.

Start with an attention-grabbing statement or question that leads directly to your main point. Especially in a letter, it is important to state your position quickly.

Support your position with personal experiences, examples, and facts, and figures.

Lastly, restate your point and relate it back to the reader. If you are asking your readers to take action, clearly say so. Be sure to sign your name at the end with your city and state.

See examples of Letters to the Editor here: [Letter to the editor: Recruiting for peace](#); [Letter: Lasting memories of JFK's death](#); [Letter: One special evening — Darien Book Aid](#)

To learn more about opportunities to promote your Peace Corps experience, contact Peace Corps at thirdgoal@peacecorps.gov.