



CALL TO ACTION

Writing Op-Eds That
Inspire Change

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Every day, thousands of
Op-Eds are published

Why do we write them?
(Not a trick question)

Simplified Answer

to *TEACH* for *CHANGE*

S A L A

This is not most op-eds these days.

In many op-eds, teaching has given way to “delivering truth to the public.”

When we talk at a reader, we’re less likely to persuade them to take action.

As op-ed writers, what's to be done?

We know that one of the characteristics of this era is widespread feeling of disempowerment.

Writing a piece with an explicit call to action is a way to focus your argument, identify an key audience, think clearly about what they need to know to take action, and get them to to do it!

STEP 1. Look at examples.

Change.org –

Pros—Very direct. Clear. Uses words like “Stop” “Tell” etc.

Cons—Already appeals to people who will care to take action.

Doesn't often teach. Can be too blunt.

Trending in the movement **End Factory Farming**

[See more](#)

Petition to Wells Fargo, Timothy Sloan, Michael Loughlin, John Shrewsberry, Hope ...

Wells Fargo: Use Your Influence to Stop Animal Cruelty

Chances are, you or someone you know has a bank account with Wells Fargo. It's one of the largest banks in the world and almost everyone is familiar with this company. But most people don't know about Wells Fargo's close relationship with [Read more](#)



The Humane League



 148,873 supporters

 **Promoted by 11 supporters**

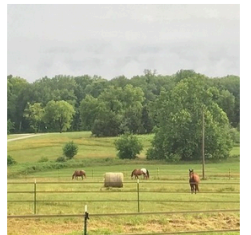
Petition to Boone county commission

Stop Somerton from being approved by the Boone County Commission

An effort is being made to gain Boone County Commission (Boone County Missouri) approval to build a large event center in rural Boone County Missouri. A rezoning request for this huge facility was voted down by the Boone County Plan [Read more](#)



George Rickerson



 697 supporters

STEP 1. Look at examples.

New York Times –

Pros—Nuanced and thoughtful.

Cons—Doesn't have a clear call to action. Readers may confuse knowledge with action.

Farhad Manjoo



Netflix Is Shrinking the World

Instead of trying to sell American ideas to a foreign audience, it's aiming to sell international ideas to a global audience.

5h ago 118 comments

David Brooks



The Lawyers Who Did Not Break

Paul Krugman



Democrats for Family Values

Amelia Lester

How Australia's Image Went from Crocodile Dundee to \$39 Hand Soap

Neal K. Katyal

The Mueller Report Is Coming. Here's What to Expect.

Jamelle Bouie



Sanders Has an Advantage, and It's Not About Economics

Randall Kennedy

The Stench of Prejudice in Keith Tharpe's Death Sentence

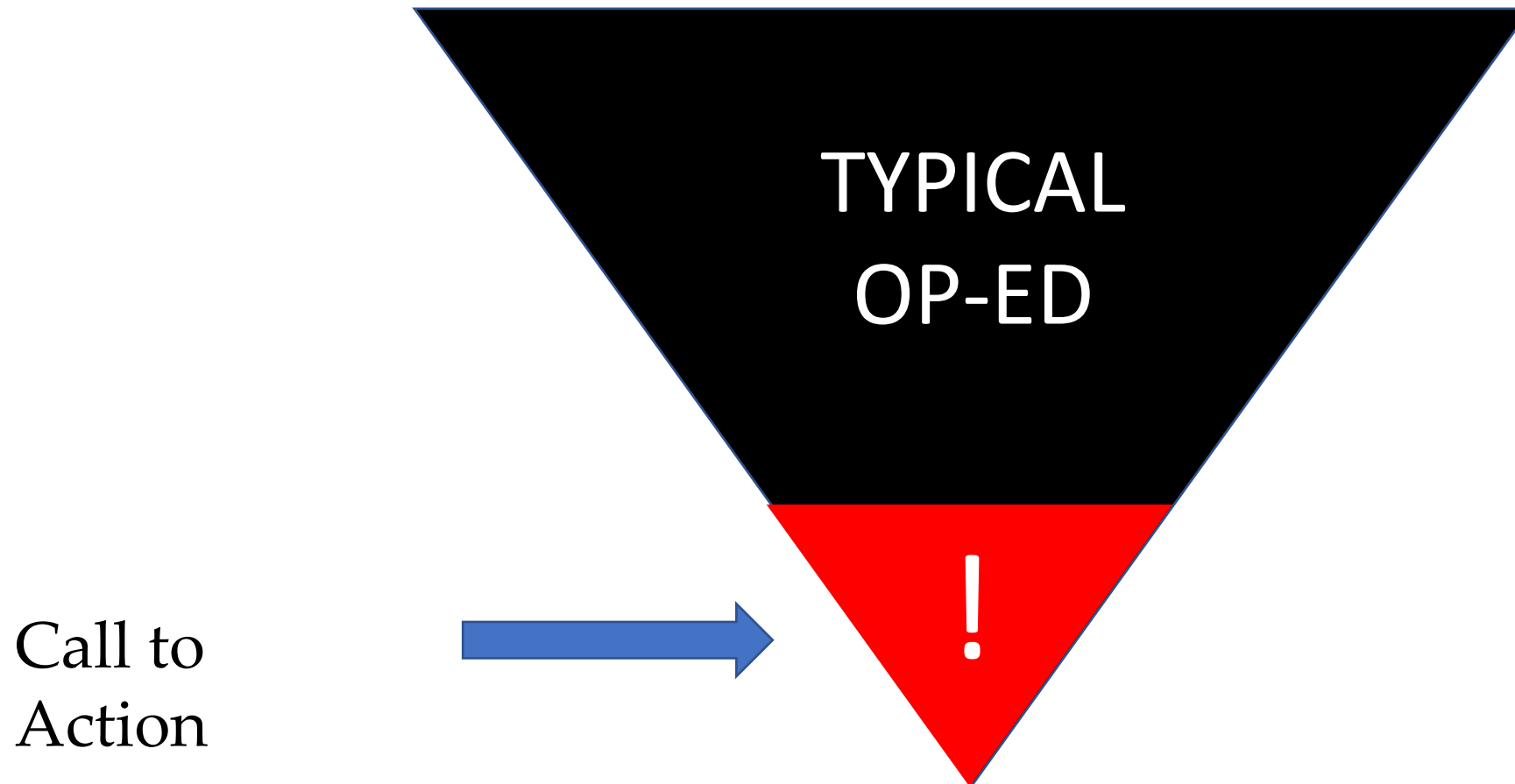
The Editorial Board

Jumaane Williams for Public Advocate

Jamie Daw

Where America Should Look for a Health Care Model. (It's Not Canada.)

The challenge: You have to find a way to infuse a call to action in a publication where they're not used to publishing them. That means writing a piece that is mostly in the style of a common op-ed, but which arrives at a specific call to action.



STEP 2: Name Your Problem



READERS REACT

The EPA should regulate
tiny doses of radiation?
Tell that to radiation
oncologists

5h

Why U.S. health-care reformers shouldn't use other countries as a model. Swiss miss, anyone?

Creating the most generous system in the world would
entail the highest price tag in the world.

Megan McArdle



STEP 3: Name Your Fix



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Megan McArdle



STEP 4: Identify Your Fixers



READERS REACT

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Megan McArdle



STEP 5: Refine your call to action

Do you want your readers to take direct action?

Example: Stop overbidding on courses!

Do you want your readers to take indirect action?

Example: Tell Dean Elmendorf to get rid of bidding!

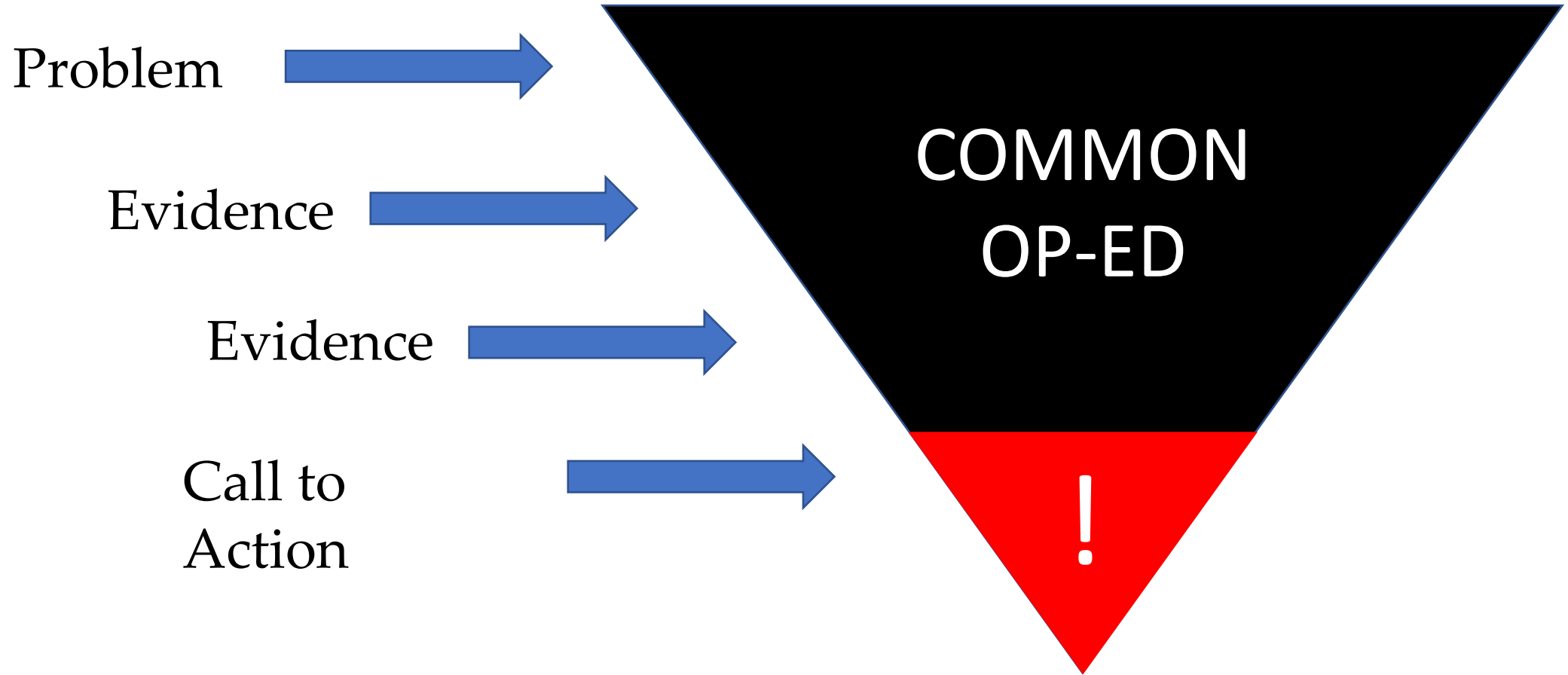
Tip 1: Map what you'll need to share to go from *Problem* to *Ask*

What kinds of persuasion will work on your reader?

Hint: It's often the opposite of the things that will persuade you. Your goal is often to get more people on board than before, and that means thinking outside your comfort zone.

Example: If you're a numbers person, is there a human story that can persuade someone without using numbers?

Moving from *Problem* to *Ask*



Tip 2: Simple rules for a call to action

1. Given the piece you have, if you were a reader, would you take action?
2. Is your ask simple enough that you would you take action without needing to refer back to the piece?
3. If not, what changes to the piece would empower you to do it?

Tip 3: Do I Need Readers to Be Outraged?

It's fine to have readers end up outraged but...

- As much as you may feel outraged, the **evidence** you share should give people a reason to act **more than your tone**.
- People are not as knowledgeable as you, so be careful about leading them into battle if they're not prepared. **Outrage can backfire**, scaring people away from acting rather than getting them to see themselves taking action within the story you've

Trying out our arguments

Pick a call to action you're willing to share with peers here today.

Write the following:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is your call to action? Is it direct or indirect?
3. Who is your audience?
4. What are three examples of the problem that will get them to take action?
5. What is one publication where you would ideally reach your audience?

Trying out our arguments

Share with your peers. Take 3 minutes to share and 3 minutes for feedback. Take notes on what feedback they give. Then switch.

Questions to consider as you listen:

1. Is the problem clear?
2. Is the call to action clear?
3. Think like the intended audience: would this get you to act?
4. Does the evidence support the call?
5. If you know the publication, do you think it's the right fit? Can you suggest others?

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