
* WRITING EFFECTIVE OP-EDS: *A training for Researchers*

JIM KREIGER, MD, MPH

*Executive Director, Healthy Food America
& Professor, University of Washington*



Speakers

MELISSA DAVIS

*Deputy Opinion Editor, The Seattle
Times*



JULIANA COHEN, SCM, SCD

*Director, Center for Health Inclusion, Research,
and Practice & Professor of Nutrition,
Merrimack College & Harvard T.H. Chan School
of Public Health*



Moderator



**THE CENTER FOR HEALTH INCLUSION, RESEARCH, AND
PRACTICE (CHIRP) AT MERRIMACK COLLEGE**

**HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH (HER) OF THE ROBERT WOOD
JOHNSON FOUNDATION (RWJF)**

**NUTRITION AND OBESITY POLICY RESEARCH &
EVALUATION NETWORK (NOPREN)**

Logistics

Participants will be automatically muted when joining

Ask any tech or logistics questions for the host in the chat bar

10 minutes of audience Q&A at the end of the session – ask questions for the presenters in the Q&A bar



Agenda

- Speaker Introductions
- Op-Ed Basics and Tips for Writing
- Choosing an Outlet and Getting an Op-Ed Published
- Examples
- Q&A



Jim Krieger, MD, MPH
Executive Director, Healthy Food America
& Professor, University of Washington



Melissa Davis
Deputy Opinion Editor, The Seattle Times

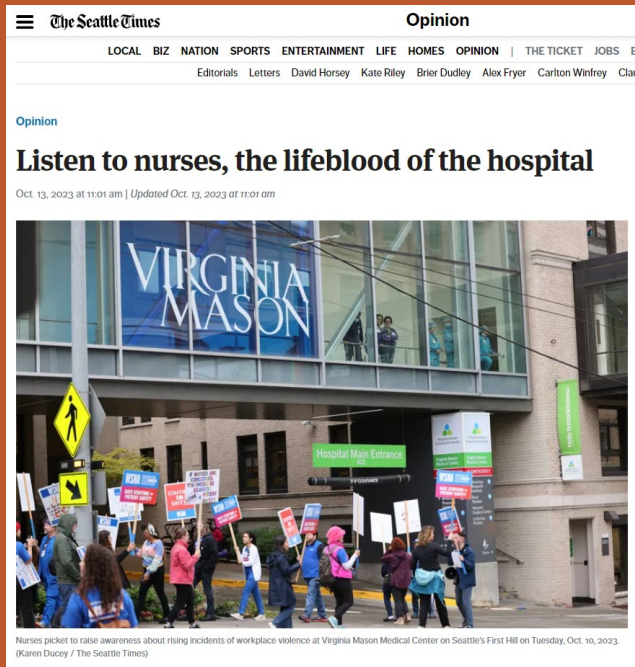


Writing Effective Op-Eds: A Training for Researchers

JIM KRIEGER, MD, MPH AND MELISSA DAVIS

OCTOBER 25, 2023

What is an op-ed?



- Short for opinion editorial
- Submitted to a newspaper or online outlet
- Has a clearly defined point of view
- Written in a strong, specific voice
- Often has a persuasive and well-argued call to action
- Is timely and relevant to current issue

What do you want the reader to do, think or feel because of your piece?

“The purpose of an op-ed is to offer an opinion. It is not a news analysis or a weighing up of alternative views. It requires a clear thesis, backed by rigorously marshaled evidence, in the service of a persuasive argument. Harry Truman once quipped that he wished he could hire only one-handed economists — just to get away from their “on the one hand, on the other” advice. Op-ed pages are for one-handed writers.”

(Bret Stephens, NY Times opinion columnist)



Why write an op-ed?

- Bring an issue and often solution to attention of public and policy makers
- Goals of op-eds
 - Move decision-maker to action: What action is desired? Who needs to act?
 - Provide information to audience – educate based on your expertise
 - Shift the frame through which an issue is understood
 - React to item in media - counter bad information or respond to prior op-ed
- Audience – Whom do you want to reach?
 - General public?
 - Specific officials?



Elements of the op-ed

Engaging first sentence – Catch the reader's attention

Opening paragraph – Express a clear, singular topic that is the primary focus of your op-ed

Body Paragraphs – Short paragraphs (2-5 sentences)

- Have one point per paragraph
- Develop your story
- Back your main thesis
- Identify and refute counterarguments
- Build support for your conclusion

Closing paragraph – Reiterate your main point and offer a final epiphany, solution, or call to action

Memorable final sentence – Stick in your readers' minds

Elements of op-eds

Title

- Offer one, knowing it may not be used

Opening paragraph – sets the scene and gets reader's attention

- Describes issue
- Makes it clear why should the reader care about your issue?
- Describes why issue it timely - why now?
- Includes a hook - strong claim, surprising fact, compelling story, metaphor, intriguing question
- Includes point of view and often proposed action: let reader know where you are going and summarize main argument and call to action
- Establishes your credibility

Elements of op-eds

Body paragraphs

- Background
 - Describe the problem and how we got here
 - Provide rationale and evidence supporting point of view (not too much!)
 - Use social math to illustrate numbers/statistics
- Include personal or professional stories to bring issue to life
- Describe the solution with concrete examples of how it will address problem
- Offer up the strongest counterargument and respectfully rebut
- Use metaphors or images to help reader visualize what you are writing about
- If includes call to action - name person, agency, organization that must act



Elements of op-eds

- **Conclusion**

- Summarize your position and rationale, then your call to action or take away message
- Include final striking fact
- End with strong, provocative, memorable sentence

- **Brief bio**

- *Lisa Wilson is vice chair of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and a member of the Lummi Indian Business Council.*
- *Jim deMaine is a retired pulmonary/critical care physician living in downtown Seattle. He is an author and clinical professor of medicine at the University of Washington.*



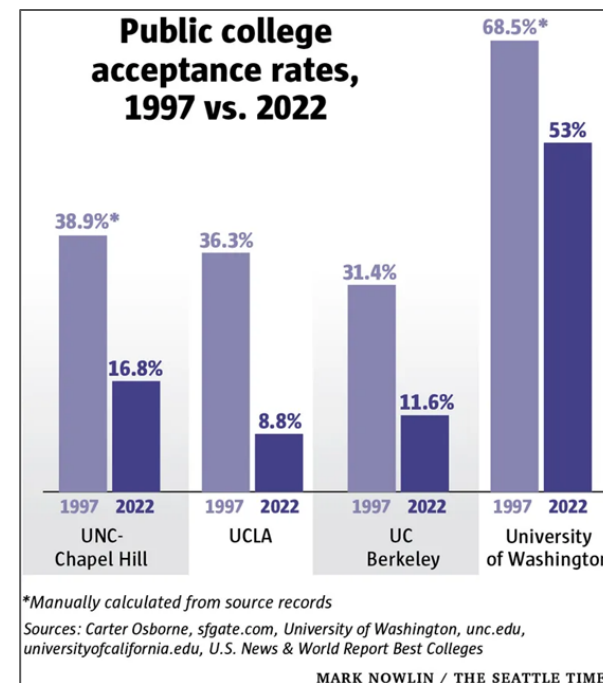
Tips for writing op-eds



- Know your audience – whom do they listen to, what do they find interesting and compelling
- Choose the frame and key messages that will move your audience
- Keep it simple and focused
 - Trade off detail and specificity for more clarity
 - Make a single point
- Use everyday (plain) language (10th grade reading level)
- Explain technical terms and concepts if you must use them
- Avoid clichés!
- Use active voice – avoid passive like the plague
- Delete useless filler words such as “apparently” or “indeed”
- Use a confident but not bombastic tone
- Make sentences short and paragraphs tight (2-5 sentences)

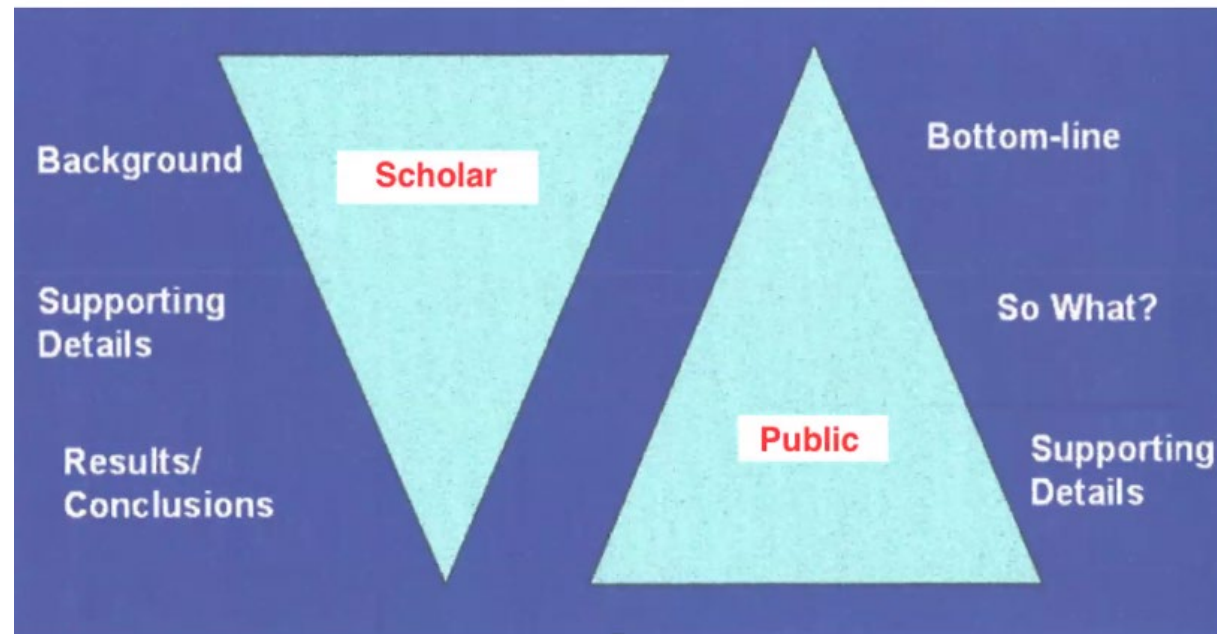
More tips for writing op-eds

- Use compelling examples and stories
 - People remember stories, not facts
 - The best come from your experience – work or personal
 - They add credibility and will engage reader
- Offer the editor a compelling graphic – photo, illustration, video
- Read the submission guidelines - carefully and early - and follow them!
- Get a reviewer – everyone needs an editor



Op-ed vs. academic commentary

Popular media stories start with the key point, then unpack the details. This is the inverse of a typical scholarly approach, which “buries the lede” at the end.



Op-ed vs. academic commentary

- It's personal – your opinion, not dispassionate review of the evidence
- It has a clear position - don't equivocate or express caveats and limitations
- It often has a call to action
- It uses persuasive communications – stories and examples are as important as data and evidence
- The audience is the public or policymakers, not academics
- The voice is more conversational, personal, edgy, even humorous
- No jargon, technical terms

- **In academic institutions, generally no need to get permission to submit**
- **It is understood that you're speaking for yourself, not the institution**
- **If in doubt, check with your comms office**

The New York Times

OPINION
TRESSIE MCMILLAN COTTOM

Ozempic Can't Fix What Our Culture Has Broken

Oct. 9, 2023

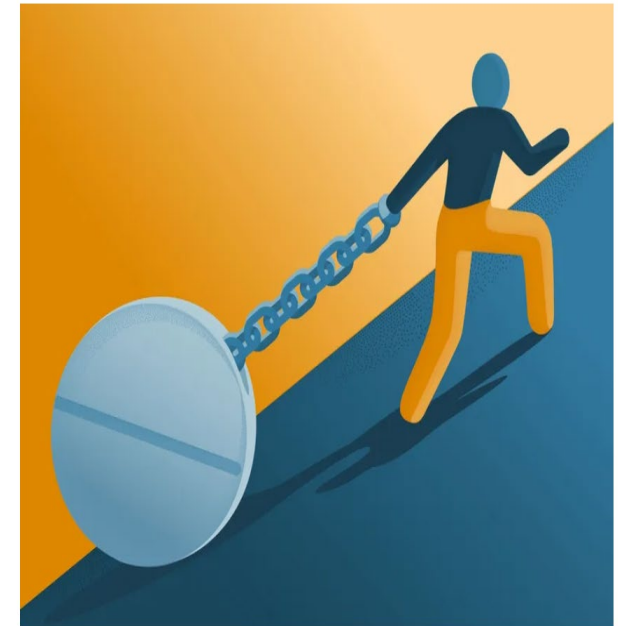


The Seattle Times

Opinion

Treating opioid use disorder is possible – and WA is proof

Oct. 1, 2023 at 12:01 pm | Updated Oct. 1, 2023 at 12:01 pm



Choosing an outlet

National vs. Local

National alternative outlets

THE HILL



HEALTHCARE

Nutrition: The national security threat no one is talking about

BY MARK CUCUZZELLA AND JEFF VOLEK, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS
10/04/23 9:00 AM ET

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

June 18, 2023

Is it finally time to ban junk food advertising? A new bill could improve kids' health

Peter Breadon, *Grattan Institute*

This isn't the first time a ban on junk food advertising has been floated. But there are good reasons to support a new push.



☰ **CNN** **Opinion** Political Op-Eds Social Commentary

Opinion

HUFFPOST

Getting an op-ed published

- If you or a colleague knows the opinion editor, send directly to them (pitch email). Otherwise, most publications have a webpage, and all submissions are read.
- Do not send the same op-ed to different outlets - needs to be original and exclusive to the outlet
- Make it timely, as soon after event that triggered your interest in writing op-ed. Whenever possible, link your issue explicitly to something happening in the news.
- If rejected, can ask editor if they would discuss further. Submit to second choice outlet if not.
- Priority is given to local writers writing about local/regional topics (unless national outlet)
- Develop a relationship with the editor

“The editor is always right. She’s especially right when she axes the sentences or paragraphs of which you’re most proud.”

(Brett Stephens)

What makes for a good author?

- A person with credibility and authenticity – expertise in topic that makes reader trust author. PhD not needed!
- Someone who will generate buzz and get noticed – consider strategically including a co-author
- Diversity – outlets want to hear from and lift up people with diverse backgrounds



Pitch email

- Subject line gets attention of editor
- Establish credentials and expertise
- Describe local connection if you have one (where you live)
- Lay out the idea/message in a few sentences
- Make clear why topic is timely, important and relevant to outlet's readers
- Keep it short
- Include the full op-ed
- If no response, send follow-up

Subject line: [Main issue] + [newsworthiness]

Email body:

Hello [editor's name],

I am [name] [relevant role/credentials]. I am submitting an op-ed on [main issue] with crucial information for your readers. In my piece I explain [main point]. This is timely because [newsworthiness].

[paste your op-ed]

Sincerely,

[your name(s)]

[contact information, including ways to reach you after hours]

Pitch email: examples

A good pitch email from a federal agency

I work for the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency here in the Pacific Northwest (Seattle Regional Office). The team has seen an increase in cybercrimes grow over the last couple of years

I'm hoping you would be interested in sharing the attached guest column from Pat on what CISA is recommending Washington residents and businesses can do to protect themselves from online intrusions.

This one does a good job presenting the writer's credentials

As a past City ARTS Commissioner, founding Board Member of the Northwest African American Museum, long time Board Member of Community Roots Housing, founding Board Member Seattle Police Foundation, long time U of W Foundation Board member, etc. and a guy that really cares about this City, I hope you would consider the attached op-ed submission on the current City Council races and how important they are to improving public safety in our City.

Example: effective opening

Opinion

Sweet success: Seattle's sugary drink tax is reducing health inequities

Feb. 3, 2023 at 1:11 pm | Updated Feb. 3, 2023 at 2:11 pm



In January, Seattle's Sweetened Beverage Tax turned 5 years old. It has been a resounding success. The tax is working as designed — delivering on the promises made when it was passed into law.

- Sales of sugary drinks are down, which will prevent diabetes, heart disease and unhealthy weight gain.
- People are more aware that these beverages increase the risk of serious health problems.
- Revenue from the tax — about \$22 million annually — is being equitably invested in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color to expand programs that increase food and nutrition security and that support child development and early learning.

The Seattle City Council, with support from community organizations and leaders, passed the tax in 2017 to.....

Example: effective opening

Opinion

Treating opioid use disorder is possible — and WA is proof

Oct. 1, 2023 at 12:01 pm | Updated Oct. 1, 2023 at 12:01 pm



It's difficult to find a single state, county, or town that hasn't felt the devastating grip of the overdose crisis. Three in ten adults report that they or someone in their family has struggled with opioid use disorder, and Washington is no exception. Statewide, opioid overdoses killed more than 1,600 Washingtonians in 2021, nearly double the deaths of prior years. This generation-defining health crisis is worse for people who are incarcerated and involved in the justice system. *Opioid overdose remains one of the leading causes of death among people recently released from prisons, but it doesn't have to be. Effective treatment exists and needs to become universally standard in jails and prisons.* The bipartisan Reentry Act offers Medicaid coverage to incarcerated individuals before their release, and it's our best bet at lowering the astronomical overdose death rates for people newly released from incarceration.

Example: ineffective opening



Health Canada exempted British Columbia from its Controlled Drugs and Substances Act from **January 31, 2023** until **January 31, 2026**, so that adults in B.C. cannot be charged for a crime if they personally possess small amounts of certain illegal drugs such as opioids (**heroin, morphine, and fentanyl**); crack and powder cocaine; methamphetamines (Meth), and MDMA (Ecstasy). On **July 3, 2023**, my son reluctantly agreed to take a few photographs of me at the Insite Supervised Injection Site **during our family vacation** in Vancouver.

Example: ineffective opening



Since about 2016 our governor, our previous governor, legislative leaders and Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) have had a romance with an “ultra” High Speed Rail (UHSR) concept (trains on new right of way going 200+mph) for trips from Vancouver, BC to Portland, Oregon. UHSR is a term unique to Washington State to convey exceptionalism. This mega infrastructure idea is presented as a future panacea for the tech sector, a transportation and environmental strategy in a shiny package.

A preliminary report “[Independent Review of Cascadia Ultra High Speed Ground Transportation System](#)” was presented to the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) June 22nd, 2023. The report provides a needed assessment of earlier studies which have painted a rosy picture of uHSR.

Example 1 – an op-ed done right

The Seattle Times

Opinion

Don't hold U.S. AIDS relief program hostage to false abortion claims

Aug. 28, 2023 at 2:46 pm



Stefan Wiktor is a clinical professor at the University of Washington's School of Public Health and worked on HIV at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 25 years.

AIDS was the reason I moved to the West African country of Ivory Coast in 1993, at the height of its HIV epidemic. *In my 35-year career as a public health doctor and epidemiologist*, I have witnessed a remarkable arc from a time when AIDS was a death sentence to the present, when people living with HIV can expect to live a normal life span, and the number of new HIV infections and deaths in most African countries has declined dramatically. *This trajectory was made possible in large part by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, spearheaded by former President George W. Bush in 2003.*

The hardest aspect of my family's six-year sojourn in Ivory Coast was witnessing the agonizing demise of patients and colleagues dying of AIDS. *I recall all too well walking the hallways of hospitals in Abidjan* that were lined with skeletal figures on stretchers, waiting to die. Yet within a few years, PEPFAR transformed such tragic scenes replaying in many African countries. When we moved to Tanzania in 2005, AIDS was no longer a death sentence thanks to the life-saving HIV medications provided by PEPFAR and other initiatives like the Global Fund.

In the two decades since it was launched, PEPFAR has provided HIV treatment to over 20 million persons and saved over 25 million lives that would otherwise have been lost to AIDS. Furthermore, the program has generated goodwill toward the US around the world. Until this year, the program was reauthorized by Congress every five years regardless of whether Republicans or Democrats held a majority.

But U.S. Congressman Christopher Smith from New Jersey and his colleagues are now holding up reauthorization of PEPFAR because of allegations that the program's funds may indirectly support abortions. Smith was a long-time advocate of PEPFAR, and he has traveled through African countries and met AIDS survivors who are alive thanks to the program. Yet such encounters were quickly forgotten, and towing the line of conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation has taken precedence over the lives of AIDS survivors in other countries.

The charges that PEPFAR dollars are supporting abortions in recipient countries, as claimed in a Heritage Foundation report, *are completely false.* Organizations receiving PEPFAR funds are required to guarantee that none of the funds will be used to promote or provide abortion services. When I directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) PEPFAR work in Tanzania, we carefully reviewed budgets and conducted site visits to ensure that all PEPFAR grant recipients adhered to these restrictions. My work on HIV/AIDS continues in my current job at the University of Washington, where I oversee PEPFAR-funded projects in Mozambique and Zimbabwe; we continue to abide closely to the restrictions around the funding of abortion activities.

We were fortunate to be living in Tanzania when President George W. Bush visited in 2008 so he could see first-hand the impact of the program that he started. The reception he got from throngs of people lining the roads and public spaces wherever he traveled was evidence of the goodwill that PEPFAR engendered toward the US; and the life stories he heard from people who were alive thanks to the program were truly moving.

Millions of people are alive today thanks to this remarkable program. Yet political wrangling could endanger these lives by limiting their continued access to HIV treatment. PEPFAR should be reauthorized and funded in its entirety and not picked apart on account of partisan political games.

Example 2 – an op-ed done right



Child hunger won't end with COVID: Congress must extend nutrition waivers

BY JAMIE BUSSEL AND LUIS GUARDIA, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS - 03/31/22 9:30 AM ET

Share Tweet ... More



[Jamie Bussel](#) is a senior program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Twitter: [@jbussel](#). [Luis Guardia](#) is the president of the Food Research & Action Center. Twitter: [@fracprez](#)

Children can't learn or grow up healthy on an empty stomach.

That principle has underscored actions taken by Congress and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. When schools closed en masse in 2020, food insecurity [spiked](#) as participation in school meals programs [plummeted](#). More than [38 million](#) Americans struggled with hunger in 2020, with rates considerably high among households with children.

Congress responded with what ultimately became one of the most effective federal policies of the past two years: giving USDA authority to implement [child nutrition waivers](#) that provide schools and child care centers with critical flexibility in terms of when, where and how meals are served. What's more, in recognition of the ongoing economic fallout associated with the pandemic, USDA and Congress ensured enough funds were available so that all children could receive these meals free of charge, regardless of family income levels. Without these steps, a bad situation with respect to food insecurity would have been far worse.

Two years later, families and schools are slowly beginning to recover from the pandemic, but we are not nearly out of the woods yet. More than [3 million](#) children have fallen back into poverty in 2022, [food insecurity](#) is rising again and school food service departments are still [struggling](#) to regain their financial footing. Yet the child nutrition waivers are scheduled to expire on June 30.

Congress must find a way to do right by our children, families and schools by extending these waivers through, at minimum, the 2022-23 school year.

For tens of millions of children, school meals are an essential component of the school day. Children get [up to half](#) of their daily calories at school; for many, schools are the only consistent source of nutritious meals. School meals are often the [healthiest](#) foods children will have access to on a given day, and research shows that healthier meals [lower](#) the risk of obesity among children growing up in poverty while helping children [succeed](#) in the classroom. For the families that rely on them each day, school meals are not merely a convenience, but a lifeline.

This lifeline extends not only to children's physical health but their mental health as well. A 2021 [research review](#) found that "food insecurity was significantly and positively associated with multiple indicators of psychological distress." One recent [study](#) found that food insecurity was associated with a 257 percent higher risk of anxiety and a 253 percent higher risk of depression. The [youth mental health crisis](#) in the United States will require a comprehensive set of solutions, and ensuring that all children are well-fed must be a core component of that response.

Our entire nation should celebrate that nearly all children have returned to school; [99.7 percent](#) of students are currently receiving the many benefits of in-person instruction. But we should not conflate a return to classrooms with a return to normal school operations — especially with respect to meals. A recent national [survey](#) revealed that 95 percent of school food service departments are struggling with staff shortages and 97 percent are facing rising costs due to supply chain issues. No wonder, then, that 90 percent of school food authorities have elected to utilize child nutrition waivers during the current school year, per a recent USDA [survey](#).

It will likely take years for schools to recover financially from the devastating impacts of the pandemic. Even with waivers in place, school food service departments suffered more than [\\$2 billion](#) in federal revenue losses between March and November 2020. If the waivers expire prematurely, schools currently receiving [higher reimbursement rates](#) for meals served will see those rates drop significantly. Schools will once again be forced to devote their already stretched resources to processing and verifying income applications to see who qualifies for free and reduced-price meals — a system that causes many students in need to [miss out](#) due to stringent income eligibility guidelines and application challenges. Children who do successfully qualify regularly face [stigma](#), often forced to stand in separate lines or receive different meals.

Given current economic conditions, schools would be far better off devoting their resources to helping children learn and keeping them safe and healthy. And all families should continue to have the peace of mind that comes with meals being available at no charge. A systematic review of [47 studies](#) found that this is a sound and vital investment that reduces food insecurity, boosts school attendance and academic achievement and further benefits schools financially.

We all hope that this moment marks the end of the pandemic as we know it. But pandemic or not, this nation should not stand for even one child hungry at school. Child nutrition waivers were the right move two years ago, and they're the right move today. Congress should extend them without delay.

Example 3 – a rejected op-ed

Like most people, I take lots of pictures—of my kids, my dog and the world around me. They may not be high quality, or interesting to most, but they are mine. In their own small way, they tell my story.

John Rooney’s iconic photo of Muhammad Ali, Disney’s moving and exemplary *The Lion King*, Apple’s sophisticated iPhone design—these pieces are so much more than just content and product. They are a homage to the lives and work of their creators. It’s a timeless principle that content belongs to its owner—for good reason.



Copying the works of others without permission is wrong. Repurposing them is wrong. If you take my bike from my garage – ride it for a few days and return it. You didn’t borrow it. You stole it. The same goes for the pictures, ads and artwork of professionals and amateurs everywhere.

Yet most artificial intelligence companies **build their algorithms by ingesting digital content** without the knowledge, consent or compensation of the owner. They deploy an army of bots to crawl and scrape the web at a speed and scale that is hard to imagine – taking in pictures, news articles, videos and way more.

GenAI companies argue that they have the right to train their AI models and build products based on the content that is published online. Google, for example, recently **claimed** the right to “use publicly available information to help train Google’s AI models and build products”.

It’s no surprise that others dispute these claims. The New York Times, for example, **announced it may sue OpenAI** for using its reporting and archives without permission or compensation. And they are not alone. There are multiple impending legal battles on this issue that will likely take years and untold resources to resolve.

Digital watermarking, however, can help content owners identify and protect their rights in the immediate term. The technology works by embedding a covert code in content that can be scanned and detected. Watermarking digital assets is analogous to adding a machine-readable “©” to those works—a clear signal of content ownership and authenticity. Under section [1202 of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act](#)—which details protections afforded to those that take steps to identify their content—the rights of owners of watermarked assets are better protected under standing law. No need to wait on the courts or new legislation.

Watermarking by content owners and creators will additionally help ensure that AI model training is SAFE – Secure, Automated, Fair and Efficient. Watermarking has proven to enable asset protection in the physical world, guarding global currencies, our medicine, cosmetics, and food. It can provide this same service in the digital world, too. GenAI engines can easily read the instructions contained in a digital watermark prior to ingesting content. Model training, powered by SAFE digital watermarking, will make it much easier for GenAI companies to identify content that is owned by others—helping to make sure these rights are respected.

The recent commitment made by the big GenAI companies – OpenAI, Google, Meta and Microsoft – was to watermark AI-generated content. Unfortunately, this will not protect the rights of content owners. Rather than focus exclusively on watermarking AI-generated content, the path to a fairer future should focus on watermarking digital content *before* it gets ingested into AI models. Before the unauthorized and unfair use. Not after.

Generative AI is the most powerful technological advancement since the internet, and how we choose to regulate it will define generations to come. It is therefore critical that these revolutionary engines of productivity not be fueled by theft.

The works that define our world are so much more than just images, products, or words. They are the time, the lessons, the stories of what it means to live—all directed into making something worthy of sharing with others. That deserves to be protected. Digital watermarking can help do just that while providing AI companies the tools to efficiently identify and respect the works of others without stymieing innovation.

As with many things, we look to our leaders to help define the undefined, to help guide us through an uncertain future. The White House should seize the opportunity of its upcoming Executive Order to require all GenAI companies to commit to model training powered by SAFE digital watermarks. In so doing, they would help build a more equitable and sustainable chapter of unprecedented innovation.