

# media & advocacy

media exposure



# support

# Writing and Getting Published

During the Support phase of SASA/ you can provide support to other activists by writing and publishing ideas about power, violence and HIV/AIDS. There are many places to get published, from major newspapers to small local publications. They each have a unique influence on community norms. There are also many styles of writing you can submit for publication.

## You could publish in:

- Newspapers (national, regional or local)
- Magazines (national, regional or local)
- Newsletters (for community groups, companies, professional institutions, civil society organizations, schools)
- Flyers/Handouts (for events run by your organization or run by others)

## You could publish:

### A Factual Article

- 750 - 1000 words
- Objectively present the facts about an issue, how it is affecting people in your community and what people are doing to create positive change.
- A factual article provides information that may inspire readers to support those confronting issues of power, violence and HIV/AIDS.

### An Opinion Article

- 500 to 750 words
- Write about an issue and take a stand on the action required.
- This type of article is called an “op-ed” in major newspapers.
- An opinion article role models standing in solidarity with those creating positive change in the community.

### A Community Event Report

- 350 to 500 words
- Write a fun and brief summary of an event to be held in the community or one that has recently taken place.
- A community event report allows you to show how community members are supporting each other in making a positive change.

### Creative Writing

- 100 to 500 words
- Write a poem or true story that brings to life the connection between violence and HIV/AIDS.
- Creative writing allows you to deeply engage people in the emotions and experiences created by issues of power, violence and HIV/AIDS.

### A Letter to the Editor

- Maximum of 200 words
- Write an informed reaction to an article previously published by that magazine or newspaper.
- A letter to the editor allows you to stand in solidarity with a writer who has written a strong article on power, violence and HIV/AIDS, or it allows you to professionally demonstrate alternative perspectives to those already published.
- Letters to the editor focus on one very specific subject and argument.
- Most elected officials read the letters to the editor to assess public opinion on particular issues.



# Steps for Writing and Getting Published

## 1. Choose a publication.

Determine where you want to publish your writing in order to reach the desired audience(s). Read the chosen publication regularly, including recent volumes/prints. Monitor what the publication publishes.

## 2. Develop your idea.

Choose a type of writing that your chosen publication publishes and that you would like to write (i.e., factual article, opinion article, creative writing, etc.). Choose a topic they have not yet covered.

- Note: Sometimes you will have something specific you want to write about, suitable for any audience. In this case you may reverse Steps 1 and 2, developing your idea first and then finding a suitable publication.

## 3. Call the editor of the publication.

Present what you would like to write, and ask how you should submit your writing to have it considered for publication (i.e., how many words, sent to whom, by when, by email or fax, etc.).

## 4. Draft and edit your work.

Follow the guidelines provided by the editor.

- If writing an article, study similar articles in the publication. Identify how each writer has introduced a topic, presented key points and examples, and then concluded. Follow any patterns you see in style and organization of content.

- Write a first draft, and then set it aside.
- After a few days of not looking at your draft, read it quickly, as you would read an article in the newspaper. As you read, highlight any sentences where you stumble or get stuck, even for a moment. Make edits to all the highlighted sections until your writing reads smoothly and easily.
- Ask at least two others to read your work and check for errors.

## 5. Submit your work.

Follow the guidelines provided by the editor.

- Include a cover letter with your submission providing a brief summary of what you wrote and why, as well as your name and contact information. Address the cover letter to the editor and close by thanking her/him for considering your submission.
- If the editor asked you to mail your submission, hand deliver it instead to ensure fast, secure delivery.
- Include any relevant photos (if you have them) and a small passport sized photo of you. Many columns run with a picture of the writer. Make sure your name is printed on the back of all photos.

## 6. Follow up with the editor.

After a few days, follow up with the editor to ensure your submission was received and to ask if it will run or when they will make this decision. Keep in mind that some publications will need several weeks to determine whether they can publish what you have written.

- If it **will** run, write a short note thanking the editor. In the note, offer your expertise to any other journalists or editors who need to interview specialists on the subject of violence against women and HIV/AIDS.
- If it **will not** run, don't despair! Ask for feedback from the editor to help you when creating future submissions. Keep a copy, and resubmit a revised version at another time or submit it to another publication.

## 7. Plan your next submission.

Keep in mind that editors will rarely publish the same writer more than a few times in a year. But, you can be clever, and have different people in your community, group or organization submit writing on violence against women and HIV/AIDS. You can even develop a strategy, such as having one person from your organization send a letter to the editor each month.

# What is an Op-Ed?

All newspapers  
have what are called "OP-EDS."  
This literally means  
"opposite the  
editorial page."

The editorial pages are different than the news pages of a newspaper. The news pages are for factual stories. Editorial pages are for opinions. Newspapers usually have two to four pages of editorial content every day. Usually, the main editorial is on the left hand page. This is where the newspaper takes a stand on an issue and writes a persuasive argument about it.

The tone of the editorials can tell you a lot about the paper, because it reflects the newspaper's opinion. Often, readers disagree with the newspaper's stand, or they have opinions about issues the newspaper does not editorialize on. That's what the op-eds are for. It gives local and national experts, knowledgeable community members, and informed NGO staff an opportunity to give the reading public an alternative view.

Many newspapers run several op-eds every day. Op-eds are free, so this means they run if and when an editor chooses, and that they may be edited without your consent. Though often based on facts, remember that op-eds are ultimately an expression of opinion. They are meant to be provocative, to challenge the reader's thoughts and to get people thinking in new ways—a perfect space for *SASA*!

## Letters to the Editor

### Sample Introductions

Dear editor:

I was disappointed to see that The Daily Telegraph's May 18, 2007 editorial "Domestic Violence is Not My Problem" omitted some of the key facts in the debate . . .

Dear editor:

I was deeply saddened to read that community leader Mama Hanifa does not consider domestic violence to be a problem in Malawi. ("DV no longer an issue in Malawi," February 2, 2007) . . .

Dear editor:

I was disheartened to read your story "Activists demanding too much" in the March 15, 2007 edition of the Daily Telegraph. Male and female activists were calling for equal power in relationships—this is a most basic human right and is essential if we are to stop the rising trends of HIV infection among women . . .

## Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor: (1)

I was disappointed to read your May 18, 2007 editorial “Marriage is the safest way to stay HIV negative,” (2) which promoted marriage as the key to lowering HIV rates. In fact, research proves that married women are often at greater risk of infection. (3)

The recent Demographic Health Survey in Kenya shows married women have higher rates of HIV infection than unmarried women (4)

Common prevention strategies—such as those based on the ABC approach of “Abstain, Be Faithful, Use a Condom”—don’t work for married women. When sexual violence is common in relationships, abstinence or insisting on condom use is not a realistic option. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argues that marriage does not provide the answer to lowering HIV rates. “In many parts of the developing world, the majority of women are married by age 20, and they have higher rates of HIV than their unmarried, sexually active peers,” Annan has said. “Often because their husbands have several partners and bring the infection home.” (5)

We must acknowledge that women are more susceptible to HIV infection because of the violence they experience in their lives. Until we do so, infection rates won’t decrease, in single or married women. (6)



John Mutuku (7)  
Kampala, Uganda (8)

### Key:

- (1) Always address the letter “Dear Editor:”
- (2) Reference an article you recently read in the paper, including the date and headline.
- (3) Succinctly state your point.
- (4) Give examples to back up your point. Include research or cite reports if you can.
- (5) Quote prominent people who can back up your position.
- (6) Make a call for action, or challenge people to think differently.
- (7) Sign the letter, with your full name printed below.
- (8) Include the city and country where you live.



# A Writer's Checklist

When developing your piece of writing, review the following checklist.

## ☐ Is your topic timely?

Does your writing provide a fresh perspective on a topic that is stirring debate in the community, or does it introduce a topic rarely discussed before? Will you be able to submit your work before the topic becomes old or over-written? Keep in mind that letters to the editor should be submitted within one or two days following the article they address.

## ☐ Does your topic have a hook?

Can you link your topic to recent or anticipated news (e.g., 16 Days of Activism or pending legislation)? This is not essential, but ideal.

## ☐ Is your message tight?

Try to summarize your writing for a workmate. If you cannot summarize it in one or two sentences, your writing is not yet focused enough. You cannot say it all. Choose the point you want to make, and make it strong.

## ☐ Do your first few sentences grab the reader's attention?

For example, you could begin with a surprising fact or an anecdote that will make readers want to read more.

## ☐ Does your writing incorporate facts?

Statistics can add credibility to what you write (see *SASA!* fact sheets).

## ☐ Do you share your expertise and experience?

You and your organization have considerable experience on these issues. Share your expertise and experience. It can inspire others! This is not essential, but ideal.

## ☐ Do you call for action?

In a factual article you can quote others making a call to action. In all other pieces of writing, you can state your own call to action.

## ☐ Does your writing keep readers' interested?

Most people scan through newspapers, magazines and newsletters very quickly. If the writing does not touch them personally, they will likely move on to read something else. Read each paragraph of your writing and ask yourself: "Does this writing make the reader care? Does the message reach them personally? Does it inspire them to reflect, think critically or act differently?"

## ☐ Does your writing use short sentences and paragraphs?

Use simple, short sentences. Cut long paragraphs into two or more shorter ones.

## ☐ Is your writing respectful?

In telling a provocative story or presenting a provocative argument have you avoided any direct and personal attacks on specific writers or community members?

## ☐ Do you have a strong ending?

Imagine if someone only read your first and last paragraphs. Be sure they create a feeling of surprise, outrage or inspiration.

## ☐ Does the article tell readers about you and your organization?

At the end of your piece of writing, include your name, organization and credentials.



[www.raisingvoices.org/sasa.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/sasa.php)