

Writing Editorials

No. 48 in the Writing Center Handout Series

An editorial identifies a problem and presents a solution to the problem or a new way of thinking about the problem, ultimately asking its readers to change their way of thinking, or take action, or both.

An editorial

- is a statement of informed opinion. An editorial combines strong, clear opinion with in-depth knowledge of a subject—of all sides of a subject. Research is essential; opinion dominates in the finished piece, but opinion rests on solid, accurate information and broad knowledge.
- should cast new light on a subject or emphasize new or newly important arguments in order to be convincing and powerful. As you choose the subject of your editorial, consider what fresh insights you may have to offer.
- need not represent an extreme side of an issue. Middle-of-the-road or qualified positions are often the most interesting, but they must be clearly and precisely laid out for the reader and presented in convincing language that shows the writer's confidence in her views.
- addresses a subject that is focused and well defined. "Education" is too broad a subject; you will make a better case if you look at one aspect of that broader subject such as "merit pay for teachers," "school uniforms in DeKalb County elementary schools," or "the value of statewide testing."
- presents the strongest arguments in favor of the position taken, but it must also address some of the arguments on the other side in order to dismantle or refute them. If a writer leaves key counterarguments out of the piece, readers will find the editorial flimsy and easy to pick apart.
- usually builds to its strongest arguments, often following a structure like the one outlined below:
 - introduction of the problem by the end of the first paragraph or beginning of the second;
 - proposal of a solution or new way of thinking about the problem;
 - statement of arguments in favor of position and refutation of key arguments against the position;
 - arguments presented in ascending order of importance or strength;
 - memorable last sentence or paragraph restating the main opinion in words that will echo in the reader's mind
- should avoid charged language or fallacious arguments that not only weaken the case presented but also can distract readers or scare them away.

For more information on writing editorials, see
<http://www.thinkquestnyc.org/wu/projects/writingeditorials.htm>
The St. Martin's Handbook (5th ed), 430, 474



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