

Writing and Using Opinion Pieces

A Letter to the Editor and an Op-Ed are both opinion pieces, and in that sense are very similar. The differences are often cosmetic. Letters to the Editor are generally printed in the editorial page. "Op-Ed," which is short for "opposite editorial" means the page, is physically opposite the editorial page. A Letter to the Editor is short – 200 to 300 words. An Op-Ed is a longer piece – 750 to 1000 words. A Letter to the Editor can be in reaction to a day to day or a larger issue. An Op-Ed should generally be about a larger issue. As a result, there can be many Letters to the Editor on a single topic. Here is an important difference – a Letter to the Editor is generally a reaction to an editorial or an Op-Ed or a news item. An Op-Ed on the other hand, often addresses issues introduced by the writer.

Steps to Writing an Editorial:

Choosing a Current Issue: For your editorial to be good, it will have to address an issue or topic that is on the public mind as of the day it gets into print.

The Hook: A hook is a catchy headline, an anecdote, a strongly controversial statement, etc. It is something that will grab the attention of your reader.

The Thesis: The thesis doesn't have to be stated up front, but your thesis is the foundation for your editorial. The thesis represents a clear stance you are taking on a particular subject. It may or may not rebut the other side's point of view. (e.g., It is said that ... but I believe that ... because ...) The use of "I" is allowed when writing an editorial.

The Body: The body of your editorial should have at least three points to argue your thesis, written from weakest argument to strongest. Do a little light research on the topic, enough for you to knowledgeably make use of statistics or anecdotes you find as support for your position. This will reinforce your arguments and give them credibility.

The Conclusion: Your conclusion should restate your thesis. It may also offer something extra such as a call to action, something for readers to continue thinking about, or a vision for the future.

Things to Keep in Mind:

Strike a balance between off-topic banter and dry reporting:

Intersperse your facts with emotional or social appeals to the reader. A lot of editorials use persuasive language to "connect" the reader, and as a result, editorials often get read more than news stories. A headline that says "Party Blunders" might get more readership than a news headline like "Local Party Undergoes Change." Likewise, readers will follow along more easily when the piece includes direct persuasion and personal touches not found in news reporting.

Feel free to use emotion, but in a limited manner:

An editorial written out of anger or another strong emotion is not going to hold the persuasive power of one written with a limited range of emotion. Strong, reactive emotion will turn off readers, while a more personal and subdued emotional theme will draw readers in.

Try to be entertaining:

Keeping all of the above steps of clarity, relevance and fact-checking in mind, there is still room to write in an entertaining manner. Readers usually expect to get more out of an editorial than simple facts, so don't disappoint. You can use humor to illustrate your points if appropriate.

*Adapted from:
How to Write an Editorial
By: eHow Careers & Work Editor*

Tips for Being Published:

- There is no correct length for an editorial. However, most newspapers will not print overly long editorials, so try to keep it to no more than 200 words. Make your point quickly. The idea is to succinctly and convincingly express your opinion with as few words as possible.
- Include your full name (including middle initial), complete street address and daytime phone number for verification purposes.
- All letters are subject to editing. MOST letters are edited for clarification and length.
- Choose your words carefully. Letters that contain libelous or slanderous statements will likely either be edited or rejected.
- Newspapers prefer to have letters submitted in typed or electronically transmitted form. However, most will accept handwritten letters, providing the handwriting is legible.
- If you are sending handwritten letters by fax, please be sure the writing is dark enough to transmit clearly.
- Letters from the newspaper's circulation area receive publishing priority.
- Newspapers won't publish form letters, anonymous letters, poetry, or letters without contact info.
- Please limit letter submissions to once every 30 days.

Guidelines for Major State Newspapers:

Anniston Star (online form preferred)

Fill out their online form at:

www.annistonstar.com/speakout

E-mail to: speakout@annistonstar.com

Mail to: Speak Out

The Anniston Star

P.O. Box 189

Anniston, AL 36202-0189

Birmingham News (online form only)

Fill out their online form at:

www.al.com/birminghamnews/info.ssf?lettereditor.html

Dothan Eagle

E-mail to: letters@dothaneagle.com

Fax to: (334) 712-7979

Mail to: Dothan Eagle

P.O. Box 1968

Dothan, AL 36302

Decatur Daily (email only)

E-mail to: editor@decaturdaily.com

Huntsville Times

E-mail to: letters@htimes.com

Fax to: (256) 532-4420

Mail to: Your Views

The Huntsville Times

P.O. Box 1487

Huntsville AL 35807

Montgomery Advertiser (online form preferred)

Fill out their online form at:

www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/section/SUBMITLETTER

E-mail to: letters@montgomeryadvertiser.com

Fax to: (334) 261-1597

Mail to: Letter to the Editor

Montgomery Advertiser

P.O. Box 1000

Montgomery, AL 36101-1000

Press Register (online form only)

Fill out their online form at:

www.al.com/press-register/info.ssf?lettereditor.html

Times Daily

E-mail to: vent@timesdaily.com

Fax to: (256) 740-4717

Mail to: Letters to the Editor

Times Daily

P.O. Box 797

Florence, AL 35631

Tuscaloosa News

E-mail to: ben.windham@tuscaloosaneews.com

Fax to: (205) 722-0187

Mail to: Letter to the Editor

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