



OPINION EDITORIAL

INTRODUCTION

Members of a community such as a nation, city, university, school district, neighborhood, or family must communicate with each other in order to do their business, whether it's campaigning for office, discussing a zoning issue, negotiating family chores, or expressing political opinions in the newspaper. Among the ways members of a community can express themselves on various issues is the "letter to the editor," a well-known outlet for citizens to employ their powers of persuasion. This assignment will provide such an opportunity for you. You will need to thoroughly study an issue that you and your audience care about, formulate your opinion concerning it, and utilize rhetorical techniques to persuade readers to accept your position, perhaps even to act on it in some way.

WHAT IS AN OPINION EDITORIAL?

Letters to the editor come in all sizes and shapes. Some are brief statements of a biting insight, observed irony in a given issue or a politician's handling of it, or even praise for a certain person or program. On the same page as the letters to the editor are usually newspaper-staff editorials and opinion essays ("op-ed columns") reprinted from major newspapers and wire services. Sometimes in the midst of these varieties of expressions of opinion are longer columns written by local citizens on a pressing issue, often concerning something of local concern. It could be placed in a special box, sometimes appearing as a weekly feature as the best of such pieces. Something of this type is what you will be writing for this assignment—what we will call an opinion editorial. In

the *Daily Universe* you've probably noticed this kind of article on the editorial page under the heading, "Viewpoint." Like these "Viewpoints," your opinion editorial should be addressed to readers of the *Daily Universe*.

PREPARING TO WRITE

To successfully complete this assignment, you will need to study the issue and then write an effective opinion editorial that has the potential to persuade a range of readers. How you express your opinion makes all the difference. If you learn anything from this assignment, and this course, it will be that being "right" is never enough; communicating clearly and powerfully why others should agree with you is just as important. That is, this assignment assumes—and you should as well—that you are trying to reach beyond the known circle of those already inclined to agree with you. To do that requires at least three things:

1. an understanding of the "rhetorical situation" (your audience, your purpose, and the issue);
2. a profile of various audiences who will read your piece, including their values and needs;
3. and the ability to use rhetoric effectively.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE AND YOUR PURPOSE

Before writing, you will want to read and analyze other arguments and opinions on the issue. In addition, you may want to talk with those who disagree with you to gain further, more personal, insights into the ways others approach the issue.

Once you have a clear sense of the full range of opinions, you will want to decide what your goal in writing your opinion editorial will be. Do you want to change the way people think about the issue? Do you want to motivate them to action? Do you want to promote some kind of campus awareness? Understanding your rhetorical objectives will be key as you begin to write your editorial.

IDENTIFYING YOUR VARIOUS AUDIENCES

Among your first responsibilities will be finding out the various interests and views of your audience. Although members of your campus community share many of the same beliefs and attitudes, they do not always agree or think the same way you do on particular issues. You'll want to consider who will be reading your editorial and the different ways they might approach the issue in question. Keep in mind that such characteristics as age, gender, and experience, among a host of other things, influence the ways people look at the world. In short, your audience may be more diverse in their viewpoints than you might initially think.

USING RHETORIC EFFECTIVELY

To achieve your purpose, you will need to consider the timing of your argument (*kairos*), your use of ethical, emotional, and logical appeals, and you will probably want to write in a voice that seems broadly representative (rather than narrowly biased). Of course, much of how you apply rhetoric within your letter will depend on what you've learned about the opposition and your audience. Remember, you are not merely assembling facts; you are trying to persuade real people by making claims and supporting those claims with a variety of logical and emotional reasons.

ORGANIZATION

Opinion editorials can usually be broken down into four parts:

1. a title;
2. an introduction that announces the problem or issue under consideration;
3. a body that includes arguments, illustrations, explanations, and examples relating to the issue;
4. and a concluding statement, sometimes including a solution or a new direction to take in working toward a solution.

The order of these elements can vary, as can the tone. Some are meant to be sarcastic, ironic, or just plain funny. Other times they are more serious and formal. The approach will depend on the rhetorical situation—the delicate balance of your perception of audience, the message you want to deliver, and how you can most effectively deliver that message.

TITLE

The title should be clever and interesting and should indicate the subject of the editorial. For example, the title of the first sample editorial that follows—“A Miniskirt, Even With Leggings, Is Still A Miniskirt”—cleverly alludes to perceived violations of the Honor Code.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction usually consists of two parts: 1) getting your readers' attention; 2) setting up your argument. Grabbing your readers' attention can be done in many ways, all of which require convincing them to read on. Consequently, you could begin with an interesting, but relevant, anecdote (personal or otherwise), surprising fact or statistic, joke, quotation, bit of history, or what have you. But in addition, you will need to use that “grabber” as a transition into “setting up” your position. Setting up in these op-ed pieces doesn't usually mean the five-paragraph forecast—“I will discuss this, then this, and finally this.” Your letter should flow from point to point, and introduction to body, seamlessly. It is, in fact, part of your ethos *not* to sound like you are writing a high school editorial!

BODY

Your ethical, logical, and emotional appeals are fundamental in effectively supporting your argument because together they appeal to the whole cognitive and emotional sides of your audience. Your ethos will largely depend on audience perceptions of your knowledge, sincerity, honesty, goodwill, and credentials. Logos is reflected in the support you muster for your position and the soundness of your reasoning. It is vital here that you introduce no weak arguments, irrelevant illustrations, or unclear examples. The body of your argument, that is, must be very tight and coherent. The arguments should flow with a sense of inevitability, demonstrating that you have covered the bases in terms of logic, examples, etc., and responded to principle objections. There is an old expression you've probably heard—that something does or doesn't “hold water.” Aspire to make your argument into a waterproof container where no leakage is possible. In terms of evidence and support, more persuasive writing tends to feel complete and rich with evidence. Less persuasive writing feels thin and in need of more support, more convincing explanations, more relevant examples. Pathos is perhaps the most delicate appeal and only used in rhetorical situations that call for it. While we expect pathos in a political speech about freedom, we may laugh at an emotional appeal about what time a certain committee should meet. When and how to make emotional appeals depends largely on one's rhetorical situation.

CONCLUSION

Similar to the introduction, the conclusion involves grabbing your reader. In addition to succinctly bringing the elements of your argument together, though not in a labored summary, you will want to introduce an especially pointed quotation, question, irony, or fact that provides a strong finish and makes your point one final time. While it is tempting to think of the conclusion as merely a way to end your writing, it actually reflects back on everything else you've said. If you don't end sharply, the rest of your ideas will be diminished. Notice that those symphonies that garner a standing ovation usually end with a bang that virtually impels our enthusiastic approval.

ASSIGNMENT SHEET AND GRADING RUBRIC: OPINION EDITORIAL

Task: Write a 3–5 page (double-spaced) opinion editorial for the *Daily Universe* on a topic of your choice. As you write, think of this piece as one that might be featured on the editorial page as an especially cogent statement on an important issue of particular interest to your readers. Your letter should make ethical, emotional, and logical appeals as appropriate to your purpose and audience.

___ The “A” Editorial (90–100 points)

An “A” editorial demonstrates the writer’s awareness of his/her rhetorical situation by clearly defining a timely issue relevant to the editorial’s audience (*kairos*). The writer’s position and purpose are clear, and he/she fully supports claims with sound reasons and evidence, making effective and appropriate use of ethical, emotional, and logical appeals. The writer also anticipates and effectively responds to potential counterarguments (*procatalepsis*).

An “A” editorial is exceptionally well written, in addition to being well argued. The title cleverly indicates the subject of the editorial, and the introduction effectively introduces the topic and catches the reader’s attention. The editorial is unified, meaning that its content is oriented around and develops a single controlling idea, and is also coherent—i.e., transitions are used to create a logical and smooth flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and idea to idea. The writer engages the reader by creating a voice appropriate to the editorial’s subject matter, its audience and purpose. The writer further engages the reader by varying sentence length and structure, creating an easy, flowing rhythm, and avoids vague, wordy, or obscure sentences. Diction and syntax are clear, concise, and precise, and punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage adhere to the highest standards of edited American English. The editorial follows MLA formatting conventions.

___ The “B” Editorial (80–89 points)

A “B” editorial demonstrates the writer’s awareness of the rhetorical situation, and his/her position and purpose are generally clear. Claims are well supported, though there may be minor gaps in the argument, and ethical, emotional, and logical appeals are effectively utilized with a few exceptions. Counter arguments are anticipated, though the responses may not be sufficient.

The “B” editorial is well written, including a serviceable title and introduction, though may lack the flare of the title and introduction of an “A” editorial. The editorial is generally unified and coherent, with slight lapses in transitions; the writing is also engaging, though the voice may lack the distinctiveness of the “A” editorial, and the syntax and diction may not be quite as polished. Sentences are generally clearly constructed. A few errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, usage, and MLA formatting appear randomly throughout the editorial, but such errors do not distract from the reader’s understanding of the argument.

___ The “C” Editorial (70–79 points)

The “C” editorial demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation, though the writer might misread his/her audience or the circumstances surrounding the issue; the writer may not establish the timeliness of the argument. The writer’s position and purpose are evident but could be more clearly articulated. Claims are unevenly supported, and while the writer makes use of ethical, emotional, and logical appeals, such attempts do not always achieve their intended aim. Counter arguments are generally ignored or not responded to in convincing ways.

The “C” editorial is readable but requires some effort on the part of the reader. The title and introduction may be uninteresting or may fall a little short in clearly announcing the focus of the editorial, though a focus becomes apparent as the editorial unfolds. The editorial lacks unity by occasionally introducing information that does not relate to the editorial’s main idea, and the transitions from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, or idea to idea might be weak. The writer’s voice does not do much to engage the reader, and syntax and diction lack sophistication and may be difficult to follow in places. Some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage appear frequently, though the reader is generally able to understand the argument. Errors in MLA formatting likewise appear with some frequency.

___ **The “D” Editorial (60–69 points)**

The “D” editorial demonstrates little awareness of the rhetorical situation, and the writer’s position and purpose are not clearly defined. Claims go unsupported, and the writer’s attempts at ethical, emotional, and logical appeals are superficial, at best, or are unpersuasive. Counterarguments are wholly ignored.

The “D” editorial is laborious for the reader. The title is rudimentary and may not indicate the focus of the editorial, and the introduction is similarly boring and/or fails to announce the focus of the editorial. The editorial lacks unity by bifurcating into tangents, and the flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and idea to idea is rough and unclear throughout much of the editorial. Voice is either nonexistent or completely inappropriate, and syntax and diction are likewise muddled throughout. The editorial is riddled with errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, usage, and MLA formatting.

___ **The “E” Editorial (0–59 points)**

An “E” is generally only given to an editorial that falls well short of the minimum requirements of the assignment, is plagiarized, or violates a policy established by an individual instructor (e.g., a late-paper policy).

COVER SHEET**OPINION EDITORIAL PORTFOLIO**

Name _____

Section _____

Paper Title _____

I have included the following documents in my portfolio:

- Assignment Sheet and Grading Rubric
- Reflection on writing process that describes the challenges you found in writing your paper, your paper's strengths and weaknesses, and what you learned about writing and how it will help you in the future
- Final draft of paper for grading
- Rough drafts, including drafts with peer and instructor comments
- _____
- _____

Note: If your portfolio is missing any of the items listed above, you may be docked points on your grade for this assignment.

If you agree to let future instructors of WRTG 150 use your paper (with name removed) for training purposes, check below:

- I agree to let instructors of WRTG 150 use my paper for training purposes.

*Name*_____
*Signature*_____
Date