

**Script: Opinion Writing**  
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**Slide 1:**

Title page-no script

**Slide 2:**

Journalists often consider their work as a way to speak for the people who cannot speak for themselves, shedding light on dark areas of their communities. This is particularly true of opinion writing, where editorials advocate for change. Opinion writing differs from standard news writing in that stories aren't structured the same way and there is a voice of persuasion in an opinion piece that shouldn't be found in news writing. Because of this distinction, opinion pieces and columns usually appear on a separate page away from news reports.

**Slide 3:**

In column or editorial writing, the opinion of the writer or editorial board is an essential part of the piece.

**Slide 4:**

Editorial writers work to persuade their audiences, to change their minds or to take action on some matter of local, state or national importance. By addressing their audiences directly, editorial writers often make an emotional appeal to readers.

**Slide 5:**

Good editorials aren't just unattributed opinions or ramblings; they have a point to make

**Slide 6:**

The headlines in the examples on this slide do just that. They tell readers what they should be angry about or what should be happening but isn't. Editorials present facts and offer a perspective for ways to solve a problem. Editorials are written in a persuasive voice that asks readers to change their mind, consider other options or confirm their convictions.

**Slide 7:**

...One adage about editorial writing is to tell readers what you want them to do, give them information and then end by telling them what you told them.

**Slide 8:**

The purpose of an editorial isn't *always* to criticize. It can teach, attack, defend, recommend, question, prod, entertain, advocate, expose... the list goes on and on. This slide gives you just a taste of the different types of editorials you might want to write in your student publication. Look to the "additional resources" section of this module for more detail on these.

**Slide 9:**

Once you have a good handle on what type of editorial you want to write – you need to choose a topic. Pick something that's on your front page. If it's important enough to be there, it's important enough for your editorial board to take a stance on.

**Slide 10:**

Select something of interest to teens – like the raising or lowering of the driving age or the use of class rank in your school.

**Slide 11:**

And, make sure it's local. If one of the main goals of an editorial is to give your readers a reason to act, make sure it's something that is close enough to home that they *can* act.

**Slide 12:**

It is very important – when you have an editorial in the paper – to reach a decision on your stand as a staff. This means having a discussion of the full group and then selecting one person to write the piece.

**Slide 13:**

When it's finished, read it to the entire staff.

**Slide 14:**

And, make sure that at least 50 percent of your staff – plus one more person – approves of what is in the editorial. When you have a majority, that editorial can be the voice of your staff.

**Slide 15:**

Once you've written it, you're going to want to make sure you can answer "yes" to the following questions: first, is the topic interesting? If not, why bother.

**Slide 16:**

Is your stand clear. If the reader doesn't know exactly where you stand, then you haven't been clear enough. Do you want to keep the driving age 16, with parents' consent? Make sure that the reader has no doubt that's your position. If someone reads your editorial and senses there's wiggle room in your position, you didn't do your job.

**Slide 17:**

Are there facts to support the stand?

**Slide 18:**

Will the headline grab the readers' attention? If not, try again. You want it to be thought-provoking enough to draw readers in.

**Slide 19:**

Editorials represent the position of the entire newspaper – not just one person. Unlike a column or a review, this is one instance when you're going to want to use third person.

**Slide 20:**

Have you written concisely, editing out unnecessary words, phrases or sentences?

**Slide 21:**

...because you're going to want to keep your editorials to less than 300 words.

**Slide 22:**

Editorial cartoons often show up on the opinion page. Sometimes, they accompany or illustrate an editorial, sometimes they stand alone.

**Slide 23:**

Either way, they should be instigative on some level, causing readers to feel something and react.

**Slide 24:**

Let's take a closer look at this one... so you can see how nuanced they can be. This ran in a 1925 radio magazine about the issue of rights to on-air performances. When radio broadcasts first began in 1920, music was played without regard to copyright status. As the business grew, music sheet publishers sued stations for copyright infringement, keeping many popular jazz tunes from being performed on air. The cartoon shows a rich publisher in the center barring two singers access to the station microphone. Obviously, this all got worked out... or you wouldn't hear music on the radio today. That's how royalty payments came to be.

**Slide 25:**

It goes without saying – to get the reaction you're looking for from readers, you're going to need a strong artist. If you don't have one on your publication staff, recruit students from art classes to do your editorial cartoons.

**Slide 26:**

Letters and guest submissions are a great way for editors to see what issues are generating interest in a community. Readers often write to spur their neighbors to action, or to call out elected officials for votes cast or good or bad behavior.

**Slide 27:**

Be sure to share your editorial policies with readers so they know how to submit their letters, how long they should be, and whether unsigned letters can be printed. Although many news outlets allow anonymous comments online, most letters should be signed by the writer.

**Slide 28:**

On the scholastic level, a good length for a letter to the editor is about 300 words. Of course, you and your editors can choose to go higher or lower than that... but that's a good place to start.

**Slide 29:**

You want to double check the accuracy of everything the reader has put in their letter. It's easy to get so fired up about a topic that they may let their emotions get in the way of the facts.

**Slide 30:**

If there are errors, go back to the letter writer and point out the errors. If they agree, make corrections and then run the letter in your publication.

**Slide 31:**

Columns are opinion pieces consistently written by a single person

**Slide 32:**

and are usually published weekly or monthly. Some column writers consistently write about a single topic, such as government or politics, while others write about any event or happening that strikes them on a particular day.

**Slide 33:**

They share facts, add context and perspective...

**Slide 34:**

...often asking readers to consider a different viewpoint.

**Slide 35:**

What might you put in a column? Well, it could be the news behind the news...

**Slide 36:**

...an explanation of unusual events.

**Slide 37:**

...an interpretation or analysis of how or why something happened the way it did.

**Slide 38:**

Or, maybe it's telling a deeper story about one person – and how the news affects them. Some of the skills you'll learn about in the features and sports writing modules could easily be used in a human-interest column.

**Slide 39:**

Columns may be used to shower praise... or offer criticism. For example, you might write a column each week offering a thumbs up or thumbs down – or pro con -- on things that have happened during that past week.

**Slide 40:**

But – one thing all columns have in common? They're based in solid research and good interviewing. Columnists express opinions based on facts learned and confirmed through reporting.

**Slide 41:**

A lot of columnists writing for scholastic press write about national or international issues. That's okay, but you need find a way to bring it home and explain how it impacts your readers – your fellow students and members of your community.

**Slide 42:**

And, you want to make sure that you're tying it back to other people your age. So, while you might want to write a column about the Federal Reserve Bank raising interest rates, it might be hard for a lot of teenagers to understand why that's important. That might be when you tie it to how it might make it more expensive to pay for college or to borrow money to buy a car.

**Slide 43:**

You can't have a student publication without including reviews! Some things you might want to consider reviewing on campus? The school play or musical... concerts given by the band or orchestra or performances put on by a dance troupe.

**Slide 44:**

Your student publication might want to go off campus to review new restaurants in your community, movies students might want to see on the weekend... or a big concert not everyone got to go to.

**Slide 45:**

In a review, you're going to want use first person sparingly. Your byline should make it clear enough that it's your opinion throughout.

**Slide 46:**

That's why you're not going to want to quote others in the piece. It should be your reaction and no one else's.

**Slide 47:**

Compare and contrast what you're reviewing to something else the reader might already know. Is the book better than the movie? Compare the songs by the musician to their earlier work. How does a restaurant's food stack up to others in your community?

**Slide 48:**

And, don't give it all away. Summarize main plot points, but leave the reader wanting to experience it for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

Slide 49:

There are several characteristics and qualifications of good reviewers. Chief among them? Honesty and integrity. Do not plagiarize. Actually go to the event, film or restaurant you're reviewing. See it, hear it, experience it yourself before sharing your opinion.

Slide 50:

Keep an open mind. Approach every work of art with a willingness to be convinced it's well done.

Slide 51:

Be humble. Be charitable. Consider your words. Not all criticism has to be destructive. Be honest, but also considerate of how you'd feel if that was your work. You wouldn't want someone to be cruel in their critique.

Slide 52:

And, it definitely helps to have some experience in the area you're reviewing. Maybe you don't play an instrument or you don't dance – before reviewing a concert or recital, read up on the genre. Know what to expect from the performers before walking into the event.

Slide 53: contact info page-no script