

Writing Tips for Editorials and Persuasive Article Writing

Tips on Finding Editorial Topics, Getting Ideas, and Developing Style and Tone

By L. Shepherd



If you're opinionated and able to write using clear, persuasive language, then you may want to learn how to write newspaper editorials. An editorial is a way for a reporter to get her own personal opinion into a story, rather than the objective approach used with other newspaper stories. Most newspapers don't offer steady editorial work to outsiders. They tend to run editorials on a regular schedule, whether daily or two to three times per week and these are normally written by the staff reporters, though community leaders or experts in certain fields are occasionally invited to craft an editorial. If you are called on to write an editorial, there are a few things to keep in mind.

The first thing you should understand is proper writing style; you don't need to compromise your own personal voice, but it is necessary to have clear, concise writing.

Keep the topic relevant. Finding editorial topics and getting ideas can be among the largest challenges facing any writer, but with editorials the process is often a bit easier than for other types of writing. The topic of an editorial should normally be about a current news story or event. This doesn't have to be a major story or event, but it should be something with a broad appeal to the readership. It may be that your editorial ideas mainly center around local or national history - that's not a problem! If you want to write an editorial about something that happened in the past, wait for an anniversary of the event to tie it to the present day. You can get writing ideas by brainstorming with friends and family.

Use personal opinion. The main difference between an editorial and a news story is that there is room to try to persuade readers with your personal opinion. This should be done in a rational manner, as with a standard news story, and with attributed sources if needed. It is not enough to state your opinion on a news story, but rather to use your opinion to guide interpretation of the story.

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. I once wrote an editorial about greed and how it was driving government officials in ways that I didn't approve of. By simply expressing distaste and disappointment, the editorial had more impact than if I had written an angry missive about how much I hated the local government. Strong, reactive emotion will turn off readers, while a more personal and subdued emotional theme will draw readers in.

Use persuasive language. Persuasive writing is one of the key elements of a good editorial. Using clear, active language in your writing is far more persuasive than a weak narrative that rambles. Get to the point.

Get your facts straight. While there is a limited protection afforded by opinion pieces, there is still a chance of your piece being construed as libel. If you are discussing people or businesses in your editorial, be sure that all facts are correct and are attributed. If you are writing negative opinions about people or businesses, be sure to begin by stating that it is your opinion. Opinions can be

neither proved nor disproved, and will not be construed as libel unless there is an obvious component of malice to them. For this reason, never name call.

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. Having a distinctive style is key in getting your editorial noticed by editors and readers; you can develop your own tone by taking time to "hone your writing skills." One of the best writing tips for opinion editorials is to use humor to illustrate your points when appropriate.

LAST NOTE: Editorials are often used to spotlight one aspect of a story that has been overlooked. If you are searching for a topic, try reading the newspaper and picking out big stories that may not have had all aspects covered. A colleague wrote an effective editorial about taxes by describing the scene at the local tax preparation company when she went there to file. This gave it a personal aspect but still highlighted the hassle and expense of doing taxes. If you do have a news story or event in mind, find the aspect that will most connect with readers; you'll soon discover that editorial writing can be not only lucrative, but fun!