



Editorials and other opinion writing show what your school and community could be. They are

## THE SOUL OF YOUR PAPER

### Be provocative and lively!

The one thing readers will not forgive in an opinion section is boring content. Just as readers want volume and variety in their news coverage, they demand the same from opinion—and they are fully prepared for a bit of a challenge.

The best opinion sections leave readers angry, laughing, outraged, intrigued, thoughtful... often all at once.

The opinion section is where the personality of the paper (and the staff) comes through most clearly. And just as the staff of the paper is made up of diverse types of thinkers, so the opinion section should be diverse in approach.

Consider including most of the following in your opinion section:

- 🕒 editorials
- 🕒 editorial briefs (5-second edits)
- 🕒 photo editorials
- 🕒 columns
- 🕒 guest columns
- 🕒 commentaries
- 🕒 student opinion roundups
- 🕒 letters to the editor
- 🕒 editorial cartoons
- 🕒 comic strips
- 🕒 reviews (if you are not running a separate arts & entertainment section)

Most importantly, take a stand. Express yourself with a distinctive voice. Don't wimp out. Note that pro-cons are not included in the above list. They are excluded because they, by definition, don't take a stand. They straddle the issue. They are good features, but they are not provocative.

### Editorials can:

- **Discuss a problem and suggest a solution.** No more editorials on school spirit unless you can 1) prove to readers that the problem is worth discussing and change, and 2) provide a solution with a reasonable prospect of success.
- **Praise people and/or projects.** Underused by most papers, this is your opportunity to bring “good news” to readers. Look for undercovered individuals, groups, clubs, etc.
- **Come out for or against a proposal.** What could be a greater service to your readers than to discuss important decisions before they are made? Journalism is often reactive—we cover the issue/event after it happens. Here is your chance to be proactive—providing leadership while there is still time to make changes.
- **Comment (often humorously) on school life.** Let's face it, life—and high school in particular—is kind of funny at times. Why not give readers some laughs (and food for thought) about the “little issues” of school life?
- **Be part of a crusade or campaign.** Some issues are so complex that no single editorial can quite make all the necessary points. Such issues deserve a campaign—or series—of editorials, each one addressing a different facet of the problem.

### A constant test for a writer: the column

Columns are recurring commentaries, and combine content with personality. Readers of good columns come to care about, look forward to, or anticipate with concern each piece. Each columnist needs a distinct “voice.” There are several types of columns:

- **Editorial topic column.** Can be closely related to a staff editorial, but usually discusses a timely issue with more emphasis on a personal response and less consideration for the entire staff. They are similar to a formal essay.
- **Personal reflection column.** These are centered on the writer herself, and more universal messages grow from these focused memories, anecdotes, scenes, fictional dialogue, etc. They appeal to emotions more than logic.
- **Special interest column.** The writer is “expert” in cooking, music, movies, TV, etc. And then she shares her insights with those of us not possessing that expertise.

### Best read opinion: letters

Letters to the editor generate incredible readership, mostly because they are full of passion. They also tend to be angry. Who writes a letter to the editor when feeling happy?

Beware of one thing: you are responsible for what you publish, so be sure to check authenticity of letters, and make sure letters are free of libelous, obscene or disruptive content.

### Editorials vs. Commentary

When the majority of the editorial board, staff, or however you structure the decision making power, holds similar views on an issue, those views are properly presented as a **staff editorial**.

Such editorials are not signed, as they represent the official position of the newspaper. Some papers publish the vote of the board or staff.

A **commentary**, on the other hand, is otherwise known as an informal essay, and expresses the thoughts of one individual. It is one of the few places in journalism where first person singular is okay to use. (Editorials can't, as the board is a collective.)

The best commentaries often begin with a specific anecdote or experience of a writer, which can then be generalized to make a point to a larger body of readers. They are personal and quirky.

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