

# Opinion Editorial

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An opinion editorial is an informal argument that seeks to persuade an audience to agree with the author's claims and act on an issue. The purpose of this handout is to take you step by step through the writing process of an opinion editorial, aided by specific examples and questions to ask of your own drafts. While this handout is designed to be a general resource for writers, always tailor your work to your specific assignment and audience.

## Choose a Topic

Choose to write about a topic you have a passion for and a reasonable amount of knowledge about.

- Start by brainstorming topics you currently find relevant in your life.
- If needed, research an issue until you become more informed and passionate about it.

**Example:** You are frustrated with a GE requirement that may not seem to contribute to your area of interest. Do some research about the rationale behind GE requirements. Your opinion editorial might examine the appropriateness of BYU's required core of GE classes.

Notice that this example starts with a personal issue (Why do I have to take this class?), then it is fleshed out with research and careful thought on the broader issue at hand (What is BYU's philosophy behind its GE requirements? Is that philosophy and the subsequent course requirements appropriate for the school's mission and aims? Should changes in the policy be made?) After researching, you'll be able to explain why the current rationale and requirements should change or remain the same.

## Define Your Audience

Your task in this assignment is to express your opinion in a persuasive manner. Keep your passion for the topic balanced with your knowledge of it—don't let the opinion editorial become driven solely by emotion. To strike this balance,

- Consider the audience inherent in this assignment
- Determine your specific audience. How you construct your argument will depend on who your audience is.
- Think about the characteristics and values of the members of your audience. Considering your audience in these ways will enable you to present your opinion more persuasively.

**Example:** If you want to discuss recycling programs at BYU, you might think about what people in the BYU community—perhaps, specifically its students—think about recycling. Do most BYU students recycle? If so, why? If they don't, why don't they? Why should recycling be important to college students? Would most of your audience members agree with your answers to these questions?

**Questions to consider about audience:** Who makes up my specific audience? What are their values, beliefs, and opinions? What stances might members of my audience take on certain issues, what are the reasons behind those stances? What different problem-solving strategies might members of my audience adopt? If my audience does agree with me, what new ideas am I presenting?

## Create a Thesis

You are now ready to turn your opinion into an assertion which will form your thesis statement.

- Narrow your topic to a specific assertion and form unified arguments to support it.
- Write an arguable thesis statement. If no one disagrees with your thesis, you will need to rewrite it because an unarguable thesis statement is a fact, not an opinion.

- Think about possible objections to your thesis. If you think of numerous, reasonable counter arguments and solid rebuttals for those counter arguments, your thesis is arguable.

**Example:** You have been thinking about whether or not a certain style of clothing violates the honor code. Focus this general question to a specific assertion: [Chosen style of clothing] violates both the letter and spirit of the dress and grooming standards.

**Questions to consider about your thesis:** Is my thesis arguable? Are there at least two sides to the issue? Am I taking a clear stance? Why might my opponents disagree with my thesis?

## Support Your Thesis

Choose three or four central reasons why readers should agree with your thesis—these will form the basis of your paragraphs.

- State these main points in the topic sentences of your body paragraphs.
- Write body paragraphs with specific evidence that supports your thesis.
- Feel free to use informal research such as brief anecdotes from your life and information gathered from other students, faculty, and administrators to support your claims.

**Example:** You are arguing that the Jamba Juice on campus should accept Jamba Juice gift cards. You might support your thesis by using your own experience with gift cards at Jamba Juice and other retailers, general research on Jamba Juice’s exact gift card policy, and other research on what legislation dictates is proper validation of gift cards. Write a paragraph or more about each of these issues, explaining why each point should convince your audience to support your claim.

**Questions to consider about support:** Is my argument supported by more than just my feelings on the subject? Is my reasoning based on generally accepted, logical ideas? Do I have specific support to back up my reasons and assumptions?

## Re-evaluate Your Argument

You may find after you finish the first draft of your opinion editorial that the thesis has changed slightly during the writing process. If this is the case,

- Consider again the questions listed in this handout.
- Revise the body paragraphs, topic sentences, and/or thesis until they all contribute to your overall argument.
- Evaluate your thesis through the eyes of your audience to help you identify faulty logic.

**Questions to consider in your editorial:** What are the initial rebuttals my audience will give? Do I give an answer to these imagined rebuttals? Do I have enough evidence to persuade my audience?

## Conclude Your Editorial

Your conclusion should explain exactly why your argument is worth considering:

- Don’t just give a word-for-word rehash of your thesis statement.
- Review your argument and, if needed, explain what your readers should do in regards to the issue you have presented.
- Show the reader how your argument ties to the bigger picture, to the larger issues at stake; this will make certain that your audience knows why your paper was worth their time.

**Example:** You have written an editorial defending the honor code’s visiting hours in student living areas. Your conclusion should first review your argument then focus on its main principle. You could focus on the idea that because many people come to BYU for the uplifting nature of the students and campus, the honor code helps students to maintain this important characteristic. In essence, your conclusion is stating: THIS is why my argument really matters.

**Questions to consider in your conclusion:** Does the conclusion stray from the main argument of the paper or introduce unsupported claims? Have I encouraged my audience to seriously consider my opinion?