

EDITORIAL WRITING

Writing with a moral purpose to influence public opinion

The test of success in editorial writing is a clearness of style, a moral purpose and sound reasoning, using the power of words to express what the writer conceives to be the right course of action on an issue to influence public opinion.

The Pulitzer Prize awards the winner in Editorial Writing seven thousand five hundred dollars (\$7,500). If the average editorial is about 750 words, that's \$10 a word. That fact is a testament to the power of a concise message!

However, a good editorial does much more than win money. It can win the support of readers by changing their opinion—and often those readers are people who have the power to change public policy.

What should an editorial do?

1. **Criticize or attack:** If it criticizes, it requires suggestions for change. If you instigate an argument against something in an attack, you must be immaculate in your reasoning and articulate it with excellence. An attack is best if it's quietly forceful; criticism does not have to be vigorous, but it has to be substantiated with good facts as well as suggestions for change.
2. **Defend:** A good editorial stands up for a viewpoint, individual or institution that is under attack with the purpose of widening that support base.
3. **Endorse:** You must give rock-solid reasons for your endorsement or support.
4. **Provide kind words:** When you compliment, show why that compliment is sound judgment. When praise is warranted it can be powerful.
5. **Compel and Inspire:** By making this appeal, you are showing a willingness to go on a crusade for something—improvements in the school lunch program, for example. Or you might advocate that this be accomplished by backing suggestions put out by a school committee that studied the problem. An appeal editorial might mean that you'd encourage people to help inform their elected leaders or public officials.

How should an editorial be written?

- **Avoid moralizing editorials. They tend to preach and turn the reader off.** Whatever type of editorial you write, it must be built around a logical framework. It must have an:
 - **Introduction:** To get the reader's attention. This is where the rubber meets the road. The first sentence (the lead) can compel a reader to read on or give them the opportunity to escape into the comic section.
 - **Body:** To persuade the reader the body of an editorial has to provide good reasoning with convincing facts.
 - **Conclusion:** To prompt the reader into action the conclusion has to be stated clearly. The best conclusions call the reader to a specific articulated action.
- **An effective formula for editorial writing is to:**
 - **State** the problem
 - **Take a Position** on the problem within the context of what's current
 - **Provide Evidence** to support your position
 - **Conclude:** Who's affected and how?
 - **Provide Solutions to the problem:** (At least two)