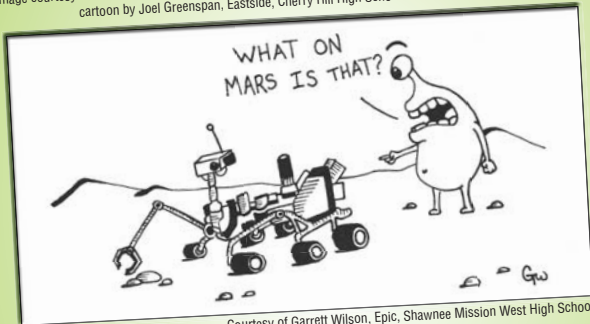


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Courtesy of Garrett Wilson, Epic, Shawnee Mission West High School



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Chapter Twelve

Editorials, Opinion Pieces, Columns, Blogs and Cartoons

What do you think?

Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Describe how publications and broadcasts identify editorial and opinion content so that it will not be confused with news.
- Describe the similarities and differences among staff editorials, op-eds and columns.
- Tell what shape the staff editorial generally takes.
- Identify and explain the use of hyperbole, irony and repetition in an op-ed.
- Describe a columnist's role as a reporter, op-ed writer and storyteller.
- Explain why it is important for a columnist to develop a voice for his column.
- Explain advantages of journalistic opinion blogs.
- Explain concerns a journalist should have when expressing opinions in a blog.
- Tell the difference between an editorial illustration and an editorial cartoon.
- Explain the role of symbols, labels, caricatures and allusions in editorial artwork.

Key Terms Build Vocab

column	exposition	rhetorical device
editorial board	fictionalize	rhetorical question
editorial cartoon	journalistic blog	
editorial illustration	narrative	



While studying, look for the activity icon  to:

- **Build** vocabulary terms with e-flash cards and matching activities.
- **Extend** learning with further discussion of relevant topics.
- **Reinforce** what you learn by completing style exercises, worksheets and end-of-chapter questions.

Visit the Journalism website: www.g-wlearning.com/journalism

Introduction

“The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism.”

—Wole Soyinka, Nigerian playwright and poet

You have been told your opinions should not appear in your news or feature stories or color your reporting or writing. But like most people, you do have opinions and insights. Yours may have special value because you, as a journalist, have access to places, people and information your audience rarely sees. You read widely, including the professional press, and research the background of current issues, including sports, the arts and politics. You are able to evaluate sources, and you are a keen observer.

If your writing is informative, insightful and perhaps entertaining, your opinions will matter and your audience will want to read or hear what you write. They may even come to rely on your judgment.

Journalists Wear Two Hats

Your writing should clearly indicate whether you are expressing opinions or reporting the news. Commentary should never be inserted into news or feature stories. Your audience should know at once which hat you are wearing, the objective journalist’s or the commentator’s.

The editorial or opinion section of your publication should be clearly marked. Even casual observers should know this is the place set aside for informed opinions. Opinion podcasts should be labeled as such. Your audience should never wonder whether they are receiving news or commentary.

Columns—regularly occurring articles—may appear in almost every section of your publication or broadcast, but your audience should not easily confuse them with news. Design elements such as bumper music (short music clips), a different backdrop or set, a different typeface, a drop capital, a different byline style or a label such as *Commentary* or *Review* should identify columns that appear in your publication or broadcast (Figure 12.1). (See Chapter 13 for review writing.)

The line between news and commentary is important, but the types of comment will probably evolve as media evolve. Publications may adopt styles for their opinion pieces that blur the differences between the traditional forms of staff editorials and opinion pieces and the newer, online journalistic blogs and columns, but ethical journalists and their publications will never blur the lines between reporting and commentary.

Figure 12.1 Set in a column identified as “Opinion” with “Our View” beneath, it’s hard to confuse this staff editorial with news. *How does your school publication distinguish between news articles and opinion pieces?*



Courtesy of The Evanstonian, Evanston Township High School



Who Will Read Your Work?

Three kinds of people may follow your work as an opinion writer. You need to write for all three audiences at once.

1. Those who already agree with you. You provide these readers with evidence, anecdotes, insights and language that express their position better than they could say it themselves. They should read or listen all the way to the end of your work and say, “Yes! That’s exactly what I think, too!”
2. Those who hold a different, even opposing, opinion. You predict their objections and discuss them, perhaps showing them the
3. Those who do not yet know or care about the issue. You help them to care and to make up their minds. Warning your audience and alerting your audience are two of your most powerful functions as an editorial writer. They should read or listen to your work and say, “Oh my gosh. I never thought of that.”

limitations of their position. Your goal is to be fair to them and help them see the strengths of your position, though they still may not agree. They should want to read or listen to your entire piece and say, “I still think you’re wrong, but I see your point.”

The Staff Editorial

The staff editorial is unsigned—there is no byline—and is the voice of the publication. Traditionally, it is one of the most formal elements of your publication and should be one of the best-researched and best-written pieces you publish. Your publication’s reputation is behind your opinion. It may rise or fall on how honestly and clearly you support and express your publication’s opinion.

The staff editorial should be the opinion of a majority of the **editorial board**, the student leaders, usually the editors, of your publication. An editor will bring up an issue at an editorial board meeting. The board will discuss the issue and develop an opinion that a majority of the board members can support. One member of the board or a skillful staff journalist is assigned to research and write the editorial. The editorial board will review it before it is published. Though board members’ opinions are rarely unanimous, the board will publish only one opinion. It will not write a point-counterpoint pair of staff editorials. The editorial board speaks with one voice. (Op-ed pieces may express different opinions on a topic.)

Professional publications may have separate tabs on their websites for “Editorial” and “Op-ed” (Figure 12.2). When the

Figure 12.2 At the website shown below the reader can choose Opinion/The Review from tabs such as News, Sports, and A&E. The reader can then choose tabs such as Columnists, editorials, and cartoons. The distinction between news and commentary is clear.



Courtesy of Trib Total Media

readers want the opinion of the paper, they go to “Editorial.” When they want the opinions of informed individuals, they go to “Op-ed,” where they will find signed opinion pieces.

In print publications, editorials are set apart by their layout. They often are printed in wider “legs” than opinion pieces; that is, they are two columns wide but stretched across the space usually given to three columns of text, with wider gutters between the columns. They may be surrounded by more white space or given wider leading, that is more space between lines. The section may also be marked “Editorial.”



YOUR TURN

1. Go to the print and online editions of two professional publications. Clip, print or download pages from each. Identify the design elements or navigational tools that identify staff editorials.
2. **Going Deeper.** Read an editorial and an opinion piece from the same publication. Observe how they differ in
 - organization—watch the opening and closing closely.
 - tone—how formal is the word choice? Any humor?
 - purpose—describe the purpose of each. How does the writer hope to change the reader?
 - length—which is longer? Can you tell why?

What to Write for a Staff Editorial

The staff editorial should be timely in one of these ways:

- It may take a position on an issue that has been covered objectively in the current edition or in a recent edition of your publication. If you have just covered a fight at a volleyball game, it is appropriate to comment on the level of security at your away games.
- It may take a position on a topic of national or international interest that has been covered in the professional press and is of interest to your audience. If child soldiers have been in the news—and on the minds and social media pages of your audience—it is fair to point out bogus charities that claim to rescue them, and then point out meaningful ways to contribute.
- It may be proactive, pointing out a potential problem that your audience should care about. If a reporter has noticed that surrounding districts offer junior high school students two choices of foreign language and your district offers none, you may both inform your audience and take a position. (However, if the last junior high school foreign language class is about to be cut, it is generally better to cover the cut in news before you take a position on your opinion page.)

- It may come from your knowledge of a pending lawsuit. It could come from an item on the agenda of the school board, the police commission, the town council or planning commission. A law being considered in the state or national legislature is another possibility. Good reporting comes before strong editorials.

If the topic is not timely, no matter how passionately you may feel about it, consider carefully before you write a staff editorial on the topic. Editorials call for action or change. If there is no possibility for change, there is no need for an editorial.



Five Things You Need to Know About Opinion Writing

Opinion Writing Criticizes and Suggests Solutions

Be positive, even when you are pointing out a problem. Whining is easy. Your audience does not need journalism for that.

If for example, new security measures at your school cause long lines before first period, cover the story in news. Photos or video work well. In your opinion writing, suggest a solution. After researching possible fixes, you may suggest that the bus schedule be adjusted so that students arrive at staggered times. Your opinion piece should describe the problem, describe possible solutions and tell why your suggestion is the best solution.

Opinion Writing Advocates

You give voice to the voiceless. You see problems others do not. If you cover the life of a single mother for a feature story, you may decide your campus needs a quality day care program. Research what is done in other districts, how it is financed and how it could serve the needs of teachers and staff as well as students. Then advocate for it in your opinion writing.

Opinion Writing Appreciates

Point out something good that is happening, something that is working well, someone who deserves notice. For example, if the school has worked well since the bell system broke, point that out. If your campus has responded generously to

help after a recent disaster, praise the effort. If you want more of something, praise it.

Opinion Writing Observes

Great writing grows from keen observation. Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez heard a homeless man playing beautifully on a two-stringed violin near an outdoor statue of Beethoven. In time Lopez discovered Nathaniel Anthony Ayers had studied at Juilliard before schizophrenia overtook him. Lopez’s observation helped him write over a dozen columns and a book, “The Soloist,” which was made into a movie. He also gained a friend, helped him, and helped millions of readers better understand the nature of mental illness and the power of music. It started because he observed well and did not look away.

Opinion Writing Connects the Dots

You see meaningful connections between events that your audience sees every day but may barely notice. It may be common to see people at a football game taking selfies, texting during pep assemblies and watching movies on the game bus, each time ignoring the drama that is unfolding a few feet or a few hundred yards away. Although everyone may see these things, you as an observer may connect the dots and point out a trend, criticize, praise, advocate or warn in your writing or your editorial cartoon.

How to Write a Staff Editorial

The staff editorial should be as brief and direct as possible, though some topics demand extended explanation. The Los Angeles Times often keeps its editorials under 450 words; The New York Times, 350 words.

It should handle only one issue at a time. If you are proposing a change to the school dress code, do not comment on the city's curfew or the fabric in the PE shorts. An editorial is not a gripe session but an opportunity to focus with laser precision on one issue and one action.

A staff editorial rarely uses a first-person pronoun because it concentrates on what is happening and what others are doing and saying, not what the editorial board is doing. If it does use a first-person pronoun, it is the formal editorial "we" because the writer is speaking for the paper. The editorial "we" includes "our" and "us."

For instance, when the Chicago Tribune wrote in favor of news cameras in the courtroom, the opening read, "In January, when the Illinois Supreme Court announced plans to experiment with allowing news cameras in circuit courtrooms, our first response was this: What's left to figure out?" The editorial later quotes the judge as not wanting "to turn the courtroom into a circus." The next paragraph starts, "Neither do we." It ends "Like it or not, a growing number of people get their news from their smartphones. Let's make this work."

Staff editorials also avoid from-the-scene reporting, anecdotes and quotations from participants in the controversy. Use those in a balanced news story, a column, a blog or an op-ed. In the staff editorial, the editorial board, having already evaluated these sources, is communicating its informed position to the audience. Your publication's reputation for intelligence and fairness stands in the place of anecdotes, observations and quotations.



And Not You

Because the staff editorial is rather formal, it generally avoids addressing the audience as "you."

One way to avoid this construction is to refer to members of your community by the name of your school's mascot: Vaqueros, Cavaliers, Mariners, Oilers, Fighting Fishermen, Galloping Ghosts, Unicorns, Nimrods, Atom Smashers, Pretzels, or Honkers.

Instead of writing:

If you worry about us driving in snow, you should write the school board and tell it not to

cancel school on snowy days but to give us late-start days.

Write:

Minutemen who worry about students driving in snow should write the school board and tell it not to cancel school on snowy days but to use the late-start schedule.

Both sentences are about the same length and both contain the same information, but by avoiding "you," the writing is more appropriate for a staff editorial.

Your staff editorial may quote experts and authoritative sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support your position and to emphasize the importance of the issue. Because the reputation of your publication is behind all claims made in the editorial, use your experts carefully. If you write that "teenage birthrates have been going down, according to the CDC," you had better be right, accurate and fair.

The staff editorial uses facts and logic, not emotion. It assumes the audience is interested in the topic but does not yet have all the appropriate information to take a stand on the issue—or even to care about it.

Staff editorials avoid satire and humor. Keep the editorial short and clear. Save humor and satire for columns and for editorial cartoons.

Staff editorials end with a clear call to action on one issue. It is not enough to create a flutter of emotion about how students need physical activity to cope with the stress of school. The voice of the paper knows what is needed. It says it clearly. *The principal needs to rethink her position on intramural basketball and reopen the courts during the lunch period.*

The Shape of a Staff Editorial

The staff editorial follows a set form. It begins with background information and concludes with a call to action. It should be so well-written and clear that people will read your conclusion to learn your position even when the body of the piece requires you to communicate dull-seeming technical, legal or policy information. Clear, tight writing will help your audience through the dry parts.

The Opening

The opening includes the background information your audience needs to understand the issue, as in this lead from the Los Angeles Times editorial "Occupy L.A.: Free speech is free" (Figure 12.3 on the next page).

With the Occupy L.A. encampment dismantled, the city is left with the task of refurbishing the battered grounds of City Hall and tallying up the costs of the occupation.

It identifies why the issue is timely and the opportunity for action. Opportunities for action may include pending policy decisions, legal actions, laws being considered or an urgent problem you want your audience to consider. The anniversary of a landmark event may provide an opportunity for change.

It indicates the editorial board's position or suggests it, if the position requires a great deal of explanation.

The Body

The body includes a fair statement of the opposing point of view and a respectful statement of why it is wrong. It may include a different

Los Angeles Times LOCAL CALIFORNIA SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS OPINION NATION WORLD MORE

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FROM THE ARCHIVES Editorial

Some Occupy L.A. protesters may get a lesson in free speech
December 22, 2011

L.A. drops charges against Westwood protesters who...
March 4, 2011

Not fit to be tried
February 12, 2011

Los Angeles gets tough with political protesters
February 11, 2011

Occupy L.A.: Free speech is free

City Hall embraced Occupy L.A. Trying to make protesters foot the bill now is wrong.
December 29, 2011

With the Occupy L.A. encampment dismantled, the city is left with the task of refurbishing the battered grounds of City Hall and tallying up the costs of the occupation. Officials estimate the city spend \$1.7 million in overtime for police enforcement. Graffiti must be removed from three monuments. And it could cost \$400,000 to repair the irrigation system and replace the lawn (if the city upgrades to desertscaping). These are not insignificant figures, but suing the Occupy L.A. protesters to foot the bill – an option, according to City Atty. Carmen Trutanich – is wrong.

From a practical perspective, it seems impossible to pinpoint who is responsible for what damage. From a legal standpoint, the city seems unlikely to recoup its police overtime costs. And as a matter of plain fairness, it is contradictory given the city's own actions. The City Council passed a resolution supporting the "continuation of the peaceful and vibrant exercise in 1st Amendment rights" by the occupiers; Council President Eric Garcetti told them to stay as long as they liked; and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa passed out ponchos during the first rains. Given all that, how can Trutanich turn around and present them with a bill?

The protesters did sue first, notes William Carter, Trutanich's chief deputy. In three lawsuits, groups representing the occupiers alleged civil rights violations before they were evicted, asking the courts for an injunction against eviction and for costs associated with their suits as well as any other relief deemed appropriate. Any time the city is sued, its attorneys consider countersuing, according to Carter.

Still, there is something unseemly about charging people for exercising their 1st Amendment rights on public property, even if that protest was confrontational or illegal. Would we have expected the federal government to charge Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for trampling the grass on the National Mall during the 1963 March on Washington?

On balance, the Occupy L.A. demonstration was carried out by a nonviolent group that did not seriously damage City Hall itself. The protesters broke no windows, stormed no doors – and when they were forced out, they either left or surrendered to arrest with little resistance. They had their say, and now the city has its frontyard back. At this point, there appears to be scant need for legal action from either side. But whether or not the protesters drop their lawsuits, the City Council should drop any thought of trying to get its money back. That's one cost a city must bear for being open to all.

Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

Figure 12.3 The opening of a strong staff editorial indicates the editorial board's position on the issue discussed.

way to look at the problem, provide historical perspective or examine the action from a different ethical perspective.

The Los Angeles Times' position is clear from the headline—the protesters should not have to pay to clean up after their protest. However, the paper is fair to those who disagree, in this case the city, which is suing for the cost of cleanup. Fairly, and without sarcasm, the paper states the city's position. The protesters are being sued because they first sued the city for civil rights violations. Cities often countersue when they are sued. The editorial is discussing the countersuit by the city, both explaining it and saying why it is not right.

The protesters did sue first ... In three lawsuits, groups representing the occupiers alleged civil rights violations before they were evicted, asking the courts for an injunction against eviction and for costs associated with their suits as well as any other relief deemed appropriate. Any time the city is sued, its attorneys consider countersuing, according to Carter.

Still, there is something unseemly about charging people for exercising their 1st Amendment rights on public property, even if that protest was confrontational or illegal.

The transitions between paragraphs are especially important in editorials. Clear transitions help your audience know when you are acknowledging the opposing position, adding information, giving an example to clarify your position, or asking a question for effect, that is, a **rhetorical question**.

The Los Angeles Times editorial uses a rhetorical question combined with another rhetorical device, *reductio ad absurdum*, Latin for "reduce to the absurd." **Rhetorical devices** are classical methods of persuading an audience. *Reductio ad absurdum* shows the fallacy of a position by taking it to an extreme.

Would we have expected the federal government to charge Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for trampling the grass on the National Mall during the 1963 March on Washington?



YOUR TURN

- As a careful reader, what do you expect these transition statements to introduce?
 - For instance ...
 - From a practical perspective ...
 - Still ...
 - On balance ...
 - On the other hand ...
 - Nonetheless ...
- Going Deeper.** Locate and print out three editorials and highlight the transitions used. What does each signal?

The Closing

The closing includes a call to specific action on a timely matter: abolish the bells, establish a day care center, allow late starts on snow days, write your legislature, rearrange the bus schedule.

“Free speech is free” finishes by clearly opposing the city’s lawsuit:

That’s one cost a city must bear for being open to all.

Signed Opinion Pieces

The signed editorial, opinion piece or opinion column, often called an op-ed, is the work of one writer, generally a member of your staff or, more rarely, a well-informed member of your community whose work you have carefully edited so it conforms to journalistic standards of honesty and accuracy. In print media, it appears in the editorial section. The piece bears the writer’s name and may be read on-air by the writer. Opinion podcasts should be clearly labeled as opinion.

Opinion pieces are almost always followed by contact information for the writer. If the writer is a member of your staff, then a staff e-mail address is included.

If you accept submissions from people who are not on your publication’s staff, their affiliations and contact information should also be provided: *Sophomore Bishoy Tawfik is an exchange student from Egypt. He can be reached at BHTawfik@xnet.com.* Remember to hold all contributors to the same standards of accuracy and fairness, whether they are on your staff or not. Fact check everything. Ask the writer for his sources. Check them!

What to Write for an Op-Ed

An op-ed is timely. It adds perspective to an issue that currently concerns your community, perhaps as revealed by the comments and links on the social media sites of your audience. It may inform the audience about a timely issue as well as persuade it. The op-ed provides a unique perspective on an issue that has been covered or discussed in previous editions, your publication’s social media site, or in blogging and micro-blogging sites. It may also comment on issues being discussed in the national or regional media when you can provide local perspective on the problem.

Do not publish an op-ed on a topic that is unrelated to something covered in your publication or broadcast, or that has not been a current and important story in the professional press or of great concern to your audience. By doing so you would risk seeming both irrelevant and selfish—the editorial page is not a personal soapbox.

Consider covering the issue first as news or a feature. Think about your core news values of proximity, timeliness, impact, prominence, oddity, conflict and human interest. If it does not have news value, perhaps the topic does not belong in an op-ed. Publishing fair and balanced news or feature coverage of an issue before you editorialize about it may blunt criticism that otherwise would be aimed at your

publication. When you do take a strong, and perhaps unpopular, stand in your opinion section, you will be able to contrast your balanced and objective coverage of the issue with your clearly labeled and signed opinion. This practice provides some protection against claims that your publication is slanted, biased, overly critical or unfair.

How to Write an Op-Ed

Op-eds should be no longer than necessary to make a significant comment. Opinion pages in professional papers often limit contributions to 1,000 words. Student publications should consider carefully before allowing a writer more space. Broadcast op-eds are shorter, usually fewer than 500 words—about three minutes.

Op-eds may be less formal than unsigned staff editorials, but they are usually about serious issues and are presented in a dignified, though sometimes playful, manner. Topics can be varied: the media’s silliness during a political campaign; brain damage to professional football players; the death of a friend, classmate or family member.

An op-ed generally uses relatively formal language. It may address the audience as “you” but will use “I” sparingly. When “I” is used, it is usually to relate what the writer saw or did, not how the writer felt.

Personal Reactions

An op-ed often concentrates on the topic and the facts, but it may include the writer’s personal reaction or changes to the writer’s point of view: “But as a fan, I’m finding it a little harder to cheer ...” (Figure 12.4).

Well-written personal reactions, such as reactions to serious events like a disaster or death, may make a strong op-ed. When your listeners or readers finish such an op-ed, they should say, “Oh my gosh. I never thought of it that way” or “I feel the same way, but she said it better than I could” or “I wonder how I would feel if that happened to me?” However, the emotional impact of the story should come from what the writer shows the audience, not from a discussion of the writer’s emotions.

Taking a Stance

An op-ed may quote expert sources, statistics and facts. The writer’s reputation for honesty and solid research should stand behind each fact. The op-ed uses from-the-scene reporting only as anecdotes to illustrate or persuade, not to create balance, as in a news story. After looking at both sides, you are reporting your conclusions and your reasons and attempting to persuade or enlighten your audience.

Two op-eds may be presented together as point-counterpoint. Another writer with a different, though not necessarily opposite opinion, writes an op-ed that is roughly the same length.

An op-ed, like an editorial, may call for a specific action, but it may also seek to change attitudes or point out inconsistencies. It may be less direct than a staff editorial, but its message should be clear to the audience. The writer should be able to tell an editor, “The point of this op-ed is that ...” even if such a statement never appears in the op-ed.

Figure 12.4 Although op-eds are fact based, writers may include a personal reaction in their op-ed, which can strengthen the piece.



Courtesy of NPR

Rhetorical Devices

An op-ed may use analogies and rhetorical devices such as irony, hyperbole and repetition, but it does not assume everyone is a friend or like-minded buddy. It uses irony sparingly, and only when the irony is made clear to the audience or when it is used in such small doses that even if the reader misses the irony, the meaning is still clear. For instance, an opinion writer wrote that one presidential candidate was “colorless and charisma-free.” If the reader only understood “colorless” but missed the humor in “charisma-free,” the passage would still mean the candidate was bland and uninteresting.

Humor

An op-ed may use humor to comment positively about lighthearted or positive events. For instance, in politics, “baggage” often means



Rhetorical Devices in Op-Eds

- **Hyperbole**—deliberate overstatement, such as calling a month “an eternity.” *It’s been a month since President Obama announced his support for same-sex marriage and was declared, on the cover of Newsweek, “the first gay president.” That’s an eternity in politics.* (Meghan Daum, “Really? First gay president?” Los Angeles Times)
- **Irony**—tension created by the contrast between appearances and reality. *There are some nice deals to be had in the income tax code these days, but most wealth accumulates and passes from generation to generation with no tax at all.* (Michael Kinsley, “The wealth gap” Los Angeles Times) “Nice deals” usually refers to shopping for cars, not working an unfair tax code.
- **Repetition.** *How bad is it? Bad enough that references to the 1930s have begun gingerly creeping into Italians’ conversations ... How bad is it? Bad enough that to many Italians, President Obama’s economic policies look like a success story.* (Doyle McManus, “All pain, no gain in southern Europe” Los Angeles Times)

previous errors and mistakes, and “dirty laundry” means moral, ethical or legal infractions in the person’s past. At the end of a signed editorial about a presidential candidate’s dog, which had traveled atop the family car in a dog carrier, Meghan Daum wrote, “... if this is the extent of his personal baggage, he’s traveling light.” She ends by saying, “It’s even been said that [the candidate] shared his bed with [the dog] when his wife was away. Now there’s some dirty laundry for you.”

The humor pokes fun at the amount of attention the dog was receiving from the media while other candidates had more serious moral failings. The candidate would probably have been pleased to see the “dog-carrier” issue lampooned.

Self-deprecating humor, humor that pokes fun at the writer or the writer’s group, also may be part of an op-ed, but not the main point of the piece. For instance, conservative—that is, “right wing”—columnist William F. Buckley once commented that he would appear on a television show if the producer would agree to fly him on a plane with “two right wings.” He laughed at his own politics.

An op-ed writer should consider carefully before attempting satire. If your satire leads you to use hyperbole—to exaggerate or say anything that is not literally true—your audience, especially those who disagree with you, may condemn you for journalistic inaccuracy even though you know you are being satirical. Many people—including adults—should read and respond to your satire before you publish it to see if the satire is clear to all parts of your audience and is well-aimed. Each of your responders should see immediately that the piece is meant to be satire, and they should be able to identify what is being satirized.

The Shape of an Op-Ed

Op-eds do not follow a set formula as do staff editorials, so journalists have more room for powerful language, narrative and creativity but also more potential to lose their audience or to bore them. Every word must count. It is good discipline to write your op-ed, then edit it down by 20 percent. A 1,000-word op-ed should be tightened to say the same thing in 800 words.

The Opening

Opening sentences in op-eds require strong writing. After all, you are not offering information but rather your opinion. If the opening is not strong, you will lose your audience in the first inch or the first 20 seconds. If your opening implies a problem, your audience should want to read to the end to see your insight or your solution.

The opening needs to engage the audience and establish the subject and tone of the op-ed—serious, satiric, self-mocking, critical or reflective. Scott Simon’s op-ed in Figure 12.4 engages the audience by contrasting the pleasant anticipation of a football game with the specter of serious injury to the players.

I will watch the Super Bowl next weekend ... I expect to cheer, shout and have some guacamole.

But as a fan, I’m finding it a little harder to cheer, especially for my favorite football and hockey players, without thinking: They’re hurting themselves.

Not just breaks and sprains but dangerous, disabling brain damage.

The Body

The body of an op-ed may contain **exposition**—language that conveys information or provides an explanation—such as arguments, evidence, rebuttals of the opposing side, timelines and even bulleted lists. Note Scott Simon’s use of exposition in his op-ed on sports injuries.

... Boston University’s Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy ... determined that Mr. Duerson’s brain had been battered by at least 10 concussions and countless other football hits that may have caused dementia, addiction and depression that led to his death.

The op-ed may also contain **narrative** (story) elements, such as the writer’s own experience or well-told (and well-verified) stories from others.

The narrative elements should be as tightly written and fast-paced as any piece of fiction, with strong settings and real (not just real-seeming) characters. The dialogue needs to be both realistic and truthful.

Narrative journalism has its own special dangers. Of course, stories should not be made up. But even true stories should not be **fictionalized**.

Ethical journalists do not create details, nor do they change them. If a conversation happened before school, do not say it happened at lunch. If one short person reports being hit in the face by a tall person’s backpack in the hallway, do not say *people* have complained. Do not say you saw the assault by the swinging backpack if you only heard about it. Do not say you saw the bruise if you did not.

The Closing

The closing of an op-ed, whether it is primarily narrative or primarily expository, should make the writer’s position clear. It may be a call to action, or it may be a clearly stated conclusion or a summary of an



Seven Ways to Make Your Audience Cranky: How Not to Start an Op-Ed

Don’t:

1. Make a claim without verifying it.
 - *More and more teenagers are smoking.* Nope. Teen smoking has been going down.
 - *The entire student body expected huge changes for this school year.* Really? Did you ask everyone?
2. Use *most* or *all* without statistical evidence. “Most” is over 50 percent. “All” is 100 percent.
 - *Every student has tried to get onto his favorite website while at school and has been upset when Facebook or Twitter was blocked.* Really? How about the kids with smartphones?
 - *We all have opinions on everything.* Even about eyebrow waxing in Albania?
3. State the obvious. Your audience’s first reaction should not be “Well, duh!”
 - *The holiday season is upon us.*
 - *Many of us take the bus to get to school and back home.*
4. Ask questions that cannot be answered in fewer than 1,000 words.
 - *Is the Christmas season too commercial?*
 - *What does it mean to be a Cantwell Indian?*
5. Start with the time element when the time is not the focus in the op-ed. Better to start with a subject and a verb.
 - *On Friday, November 28, students involved with the larger “occupy” were pepper-sprayed.* Would it have been OK on Saturday, November 29?
 - *Every year there is a huge story about nutrition in American schools.* Only once a year?
6. Make your audience wade through a swamp of empty words to get to the noun and verb. *Whether it be in the form of Tumblr posts, music videos or ubiquitous YouTube advertisements, it’s certain that something is brewing in mainstream American culture, something that’s been bubbling underneath the surface for centuries. Feminism.* Without the confusing swamp of words, the writer seems to mean, “Aren’t we about ready to outgrow our gender biases?”
7. Fragments! Gawwkkkk! Save the single words for the headline, or better yet, the slammer in the headline.
 - *Lockers. In almost every high school movie ever made ...*
 - *Homework. College applications. SATs. What more can a senior ...*
 - *Spirit week. Five craze-filled school days ...*

important insight. The closing may seek to motivate the audience's actions or to change their attitudes.

I'll watch the Super Bowl next week with my children and wonder how comfortable we fans can be, sitting and snacking while too many of the players we cheer entertain us and get rich at such terrible cost to themselves.

Columns

Columns are regularly occurring articles published in the same section—and often the same position on the page or in the broadcast—in each edition, broadcast or post. A column is written by the same person—or a series of people—each time it appears. At most major papers, columnists write two or three times a week. Two or three columnists trade off throughout the week, so readers know where to look for a column in each edition. In papers that publish less often, the column appears in every edition. Broadcasts establish a set schedule for columns—and columnists—to appear.

Figure 12.1 shows how design elements can mark an opinion column as different from news and feature content. These design elements will draw your audience's eye and ear to your work. They also signal that the column is the opinion of one person.

Columns may appear in almost any section of your publication, but columnists usually focus on their specialties, their beats. That is, they specialize in a limited number of topics. For example, one columnist may write about state politics, laws and policies, another about local governments and the people affected by local government decisions, and a third about education.

Your columns will become stronger over time as you learn more about the topics you cover. Though columnists may branch out to write about a variety of topics, your readers should expect them to be highly knowledgeable about a limited number of beats. Your electronic media columnist would not be expected to provide expert commentary on the cheerleading finals. Your fashion columnist is not expected to provide expert coverage of religion in his column. The sports section often divides the column-writing responsibilities so that two or more columnists follow different sports in fall, winter and spring.

A columnist is a combination of a beat reporter, an op-ed writer and a narrative author who shares his informed opinions with his audience over and over again. His is one of the most prized jobs in journalism. If you do this job well, people will look for your writing no matter what your topic. They will stop you in the halls to agree with you or argue with you about what you have written. If you do it poorly, only your mother will read it.

What Does It Take to Be a Good Columnist?

Columnists need the strengths of an experienced reporter and the skills of an op-ed writer. They also need many of the talents of a short story writer, though of course columnists—like other ethical

journalists—do not create or misrepresent facts. An effective columnist needs to create a unique voice and appropriate tone to bring readers back, column after column.

The Columnist as Reporter

Like a good reporter, a columnist needs to know her beat and her sources well so that she can continue to find interesting story ideas and not miss important developments. She needs a broad base of knowledge and good reporting and interviewing skills. She needs a firm grasp of the core news values as well as the knack of finding the unsung hero or the out-of-the-way event. She needs a nose for news, for almost all columns are built around a news peg.



Show Me What You See Before You Tell Me What You Think

Yvette Cabrera is an award-winning investigative journalist. Her Orange County Register column headlined "Brewing: Latinos are the most targeted by the beer industry. How much are we missing because we're too drunk to remember it?" is about beer and the Latino community. It reports as well as comments. The news pegs—there are two—are the release of a Latino-themed commercial for Miller beer and one local nonprofit's efforts to fight alcoholism in the community. In her column she reports:



Photo by Daniel A. Anderson, Courtesy of Yvette Cabrera

... America Bracho and her Santa Ana nonprofit Latino Health Access launched a campaign of their own. But not with slick television commercials or thousands of dollars.

Instead, America comes live and direct on the kind of sweaty August afternoon that makes you want to retreat to a shady, air-conditioned corner. She and her team of health workers advance into the heat of Santa Ana's streets.

You can see signs of their door-knocking, pavement-pounding work all over the tree-lined neighborhood near Garfield Elementary. Sarapes, bright rainbow-colored blankets that symbolize nurturing and caring, are draped from apartment balconies, chain-link fences and doorways. These sarapes show solidarity for alcohol awareness and compassion for families affected by alcohol.

Though Cabrera has a strong, even impassioned, message, the work of Latino Health Access and the release of the Latino-themed advertising campaign provide the news pegs. Her column is timely and springs from her knowledge of her beat.

The Columnist as Op-Ed Writer

A columnist's job may begin as a reporter's job, but it goes beyond it. A columnist needs to discover the meaning in the events. Like an editorial or op-ed writer, a columnist may criticize and suggest solutions, advocate, appreciate and point out when an incident is becoming a trend. He needs to be master of the op-ed form because columns are also opinion pieces. Like op-eds, they include facts, interviews, anecdotes, or characters and conflicts that illuminate the point the columnist wants to make or the insight the columnist wants to share. In a column, characters or events often figure more prominently than in an op-ed.

Like the op-ed writer, the columnist needs to be able to identify the point; for instance, "The point of this column is that mentally ill people love and are loved, even if they cannot function in families." That sentence will probably not appear in the column, but the columnist needs to be able to tell an editor or responder what the point is. The copy editor who creates the headline should be able to recognize this point. The copy editor may even use it as the headline.

For instance, in Cabrera's story the headline *says* what the column *shows*.

Brewing: Latinos are the most targeted by the beer industry. How much are we missing because we're too drunk to remember it?

The Columnist as Storyteller

Columnists report real settings, such as the hot August streets of Santa Ana, California. They portray real people—columnists never create events or characters, but they portray them as deftly as any short story writer and in just a few words.

Cabrera begins her column by describing the beer company's advertising campaign, which is aimed at Latinos. The lead is

I don't know his name, but he's brown-skinned like me. I don't know who he is, but he tells me in that voice—that played out, pachuco-style East L.A. drawl—that beer is part of our lives.

Our lives being Latino. The beer being Miller.

"People talk with friends over this beer. They spend time with family over this beer," the man says into the camera and directly into my living room via the only connection we have: my television.

Columnists sketch real conflicts. Cabrera reports on an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in Anaheim.

... when a Mexican father told the group that even after 3 1/2 years of being sober it was hard to win back his family. "My 18-year-old still rejects me. I hurt her the most," he said.

Columnists may pace the action, sometimes breaking from the action at a crucial point to provide statistics and quotes, then return to finish their story. A story often frames the column, beginning with the lead and not ending until the final line. Well-told stories keep audiences interested. They make the columnist's point.

The Voice of the Column

A columnist needs to develop and sustain a voice—a characteristic way of expressing herself—that her audience recognizes and enjoys. A voice helps maintain a regular following, that is, repeat readers and viewers. Finding your voice is as much art as science—voice is made up of thousands of choices—but finding it is an essential part of column writing.

Sandy Banks, who writes a twice-weekly column for the Los Angeles Times, tells how she developed her voice:

I try to follow the advice I offer to young women: Be true to yourself. I don't always have the answers, but I am always willing to ask the questions. I try to follow my own heart in pursuit of columns, and that means owning up to confusion, conflict, indecision, anger, awe. I try to be intellectually curious and emotionally vulnerable. If you are reliably authentic, people may disagree, but they will trust you enough to at least listen.



Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

MEET THE PROFESSIONALS:

Sandy Banks

Sandy Banks grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, with an after-school routine: On cold days, she'd lie on the floor, put her feet on a heating vent and read Ann Landers and

Dear Abby. Then she'd clip out her favorite columns and stick them in her journal. She still has a few. They remind her of the power of the written word to comfort, challenge, teach and inspire.

She worked on her college paper at Ohio State University, but when her mother was diagnosed with cancer during her sophomore year, she moved home to help care for her. Sandy's mother died a few months later.

The next year Sandy graduated *cum laude* from Cleveland State University and took a job as a sports writer at a black weekly newspaper while

trying to decide between law school and teaching. She had so much fun—and learned so much from the people she wrote about—that she found herself hooked on journalism. She spent two years as a reporter at the Cleveland Press before moving to California in 1979 to join the staff of the Los Angeles Times.

She has worked for the Los Angeles Times as an education reporter, the religion and education editor, assistant metropolitan editor, a features columnist, an editorial writer and as the director of the newspaper's internship program. She was on the team awarded a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Los Angeles riots in 1992.

She is best known for her twice-a-week columns on events and issues in the news, which offer her personal perspective as an African-American woman and a single mother—her husband died when her three girls were small.



It's Not How You Talk!

Record yourself in conversation with others, especially when you think you are being witty or persuasive. Then type out a transcript of your words. Are you witty and persuasive in print?

Very few people seem intelligent or interesting when they transfer their speaking voices directly

to print or broadcast. Skillful columnists appear to be using "everyday language" and a casual voice, but their job is rarely as simple as "writing the way you speak." A columnist needs to develop a written voice through careful choices and careful rewriting. Columnists know that their everyday speaking voice will not necessarily make an appropriate and enjoyable voice in a column.

Columnists frequently create a persona—a personality—for their columns that they may not use in their other writing. The persona is not fictional—it is rather an attitude toward himself or his reader and his topic that the columnist puts on or takes off like work clothes, different clothes for different writing tasks. When the audience and the purpose vary, so does the persona and therefore the voice.

Chris Erskine (Figure 12.5), a Los Angeles Times columnist and editor, uses several voices as he contributes four types of reoccurring works for the paper.

1. Travel Ticker, a weekly feature for the paper's travel section.
2. Fan of the House, a column for the sports section.
3. Man About Town, a column in the home & garden section.
4. Book reviews.

For each task, each with a different audience and purpose, he assumes a different persona.

As he writes "Travel Ticker," Erskine is a journalist, almost always in the background, collecting and prioritizing travel opportunities and events, then crafting the 5 W's into brief mentions, each separated by four dots.

Erskine says, "I try to keep it a little jaunty, but most of the work goes into collecting the info."

A "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie marathon, plus a question-and-answer session with some members of the cast and production team, will be part of the ParkFilm Fest on May 5 at Paramount Studios. Proceeds will help offset cuts to California state parks. Info: www.calparks.org/... Big Bear Lake is offering special deals for cycling fans at this year's Amgen Tour of California Stage 6 Finish, May 18.



Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

Figure 12.5 Los Angeles Times columnist Chris Erskine.

In the Fan of the House sports columns, Erskine *talks* to his audience, usually as one fan to another, often with some fan-to-fan ribbing. He writes, "I'm constantly fighting against the forces who take it (sports) all too seriously, even though for those involved, it's a big and serious business. The fans shouldn't see it that way though, which is where I come in."

While you were sleeping, L.A. has become America's most-accomplished sports town—three teams in the playoffs, a first-place baseball club, a championship soccer franchise and a college football team that will probably contend for a title this fall.

At one point, it looked as if the Lakers and the Clippers would be squaring off against each other at the Big Staple at the same time the Kings would be in the Stanley Cup finals.

OK, get a grip.

In the Man About Town columns, Erskine often writes about his own family's experiences in Los Angeles. Here, his voice is the most distinctive. Erskine writes, "I mock myself to make up for my mocking of everything else."

He is a clueless, large-sized child surrounded by—and at the mercy of—a competent wife (he refers to her as "Posh" or "Poshy"), sons (he refers to the youngest as "the little guy") and competent daughters. He refers to one as "the lovely and patient older daughter." As for the younger, he writes:

Took the daughters surfing the other day. I've noticed lately that most of the activities they like have dollar signs in front of them. In fact, one of them just legally changed her name to Visa. Tough decision. It was either that or Cha-Ching.

But when Erskine reviews comedian and actor Paul Reiser's book "Familyhood," he discusses the author's voice as ably as would any professor of literature.

As a performer, Reiser's particular gift seems to give words a percussive emphasis, almost a rim shot. They are reactive, these jabs, to other people in the show.

In his writing, it takes a while to hear that voice again, to find the beats of his sentences. But if you like Reiser the comic, you're likely to enjoy Reiser the writer ...

Point of view is everything with Reiser, not to mention an eye for the little things in a father's life. Reiser doesn't so much pick the right word as accentuate the right emotion.

"Next to the computer on my desk is a black-and-white photograph of my mother and father on their wedding day," he writes. "They look impossibly young; he in his Army uniform, looking like a cross between John Garfield and Glenn Miller; she, beautiful and sparkly, a Jewish Donna Reed. Stare at it long enough and you can almost make out the sound of their thoughts."

Fine passage, particularly that "sound of their thoughts" line. It captures Reiser at his best ...

Who better than a columnist to appreciate a writer's voice?

Journalistic Blogs

A blog is a publishing format—online, updated frequently. A **journalistic blog**—unlike a personal blog—follows journalism ethics and standards and may contain the same sorts of content that are in the rest of the journalistic publication, including reviews, op-eds, columns and editorial cartoons (Figure 12.6).

One of the beauties of the blog format is its freedom. This applies to editorial content as well as all other journalistic content.

It can be shorter than a column, or longer. It can be more timely than a column, or it can be evergreen; that is, without a strong time element and therefore fresh—"green"—for a long time. It can include sound, photos or video. It can be full of links to evidence and background—documents,

Figure 12.6 Journalistic blogs can report news or express informed opinions. They can embed links to further reading and sources and they can be as long or short as the topic requires. *How does a journalist's blog need to differ from that of a private citizen?*



Courtesy Discover magazine, DiscoverMagazine.com

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websites and audio and video elements as well as other stories your publication has covered.

A blog can be one observation, or it can follow a story as it unfolds, adding new entries several times during a day. Adding new posts requires some skill. The newest blog generally will appear on top, with older ones available below. The new posts need to be clear even to those readers who have not read the earlier entries.

Blog Advantages

Journalistic blogs allow you to exchange ideas and information with your audience. The number of responses may indicate your audience's interest in the topic and suggest which stories deserve more coverage. Readers may suggest additional story ideas, tell you more facts and stories about the positions you take and correct you when you are wrong either in fact or in perspective. They will remind you if there is another side that has not been represented or point out that you have ignored important background information.

Journalistic blogs allow you to grow as a multimedia storyteller using sound, interactive elements, and still and video images on short entries.

They allow you to develop your voice as a columnist, to develop your ability to find column-worthy, newsworthy stories and to grow as an interviewer, a researcher and an opinion writer.

Standards Are the Same

Journalist blogs should adhere to the same ethical and journalistic standards as the rest of your publication or broadcast.

- Opinion blogs should be separated from news blogs. Your readers should know whether the blog is news or commentary.
- Good headlines and your byline should pull readers and viewers to your blog.
- Opinions need to be backed by facts and examples.
- Facts need to be backed by solid reporting.
- Blogs should be checked for libel, slander, invasion of privacy and copyright infringement. Links embedded in your blog are a strong way to share content without breaking copyright laws.
- Blogs should adhere to the same standards of language use and appropriateness as the rest of your publication.
- Blogs should be fact checked for accuracy and proofread for your publication's style.
- At least two sets of eyes should see a blog before it is posted. One is usually an online editor.

Journalistic blogs are not the correct forum for all your private opinions. As a journalist you need to guard against expressing any opinion that would make you appear incapable of covering news in a fair and balanced manner. Be careful to remain a journalist.

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YOUR TURN

With a small group, make a list of 10 topics about which you have opinions or about which you have made complaints or comments. For each of the opinions, complaints or comments, describe research or perspectives that would turn the topic into a journalistic blog.

Example (so far this is a personal complaint): *Why do all of our teachers have to assign big projects due the last week before Christmas break? I have papers or projects in five classes, all due in the last three days!*

To make it a topic for a journalistic blog, you would need to talk with teachers who make such assignments. If you find that they assign such projects because Christmas break gives them time to correct them, you could write a humorous piece about how all of you stress out to submit the projects before the holiday but the teachers go home with their rolling luggage full of essays to grade during the holiday.

In professional publications, bloggers are often limited to one range of topics. In your publication, your viewers should know whose blog to read for commentary on softball, the academic decathlon, the child care class or the culinary arts class. For successful journalistic blogging, remember these guidelines.

- Post commentary regularly so that the audience keeps looking to your blog for new material. Stale blogs should be archived, usually with a link on the blogger's page to the older stories.
- Good writing garners readers. Bad writing bores.
- The same is true for photos and videos. Do not waste your audience's time.
- Develop a voice for your blog.
- Sound, slide shows and videos also may have a distinct voice.

Editorial Illustrations and Cartoons

Though photographs are relatively rare in editorial and opinion sections, these sections are not visually uninteresting columns of text. Editorial illustrations and editorial cartoons add visual interest and depth to the writing and to the section. Both types of editorial work cause the viewer to think. They both need to be clearly and cleanly drawn, whether by hand or by computer.

Technically, an editorial illustration and an editorial cartoon are different. An **editorial illustration** enriches an op-ed piece and is meant to draw the readers or viewers into the article and to emphasize its point (Figure 12.7).

An **editorial cartoon**, on the other hand, may be about a new topic not already discussed in writing or provide a new viewpoint on a topic that has been discussed. An editorial cartoon is frequently critical of the subjects it portrays and almost always attempts to make a single, pointed comment about the issue being discussed (Figure 12.8 on page 378).

ECONOMIC HOLIDAY

Black Friday shopping overshadows time with family

Amanda Livingston
Opinions Editor

Black Friday. The day when companies prepare their stores for a massive crowd of aggressive, sale seeking customers.

My dad has worked retail pretty much all his life with the exception of one year he was unemployed. As a kid, my dad wasn't gone too much to work for Black Friday -- or at least, it seemed that way.

As the years have gone on, I've become more aware of the gap left by the absence of his presence.

My dad worked for a number of years at Target, where they would have to be at the store at 4 a.m., to open at 6 in the morning. They would then work a 12 hour shift.

When he worked at the Sony Outlet store in San Marcos, my dad would have to eat an early dinner on Thanksgiving, and take a nap before leaving for work at 9 p.m. They would then work until midnight prepping the store, and would open at midnight.

Black Friday is a ludicrous excuse for businesses to boost profits by making people work obscenely scheduled hours so that consumers can go out and spend all their money on things they don't need.

Occasionally there's some insane customer who pulls a knife or a gun on someone, just because they called dibs on a shirt that someone else tried to grab at the same time. Last year a woman took a knife from the home accessories section of a Wal-Mart, only to use it to stab a man several times to prevent him from taking the last Xbox 360.

Some would argue, that Black Friday saves money on holiday presents and that the deals are great. I won't deny that. You can get all your Christmas shopping out of the way, for much less than you would spend on a normal shopping excursion. Others would argue that when someone applies for a job in retail, they should know what they're signing up for.

However the amount of hours the employees are asked to work has increased greatly over the years and the dangerous crowds make it difficult to support. Before, retail stores would open the Friday following Thanksgiving, but now some like Kmart, aren't closing at all.

Corporations need to set a boundary, and stop taking away from something as special as Thanksgiving.

The Thanksgiving season is about being thankful and taking advantage of what you are given, and what you have. Having a shopping day right after Thanksgiving where people spend their money to buy a bunch of new stuff takes away the meaning of the holiday!

Article by Amanda Livingston, Illustration by Johanna Dakay, The Eagle's Eye, W. Charles Akins High School



YOUR TURN

Clip or print two editorial illustrations and two editorial cartoons that communicate to you. Describe to your group or class what each piece of editorial art means to you.

Symbols, labels, caricatures, and references to common sayings and stories all help make the meaning of the art clear. These communication tools are especially important if the artwork is an editorial cartoon not associated with a story.

Symbols

Editorial illustrations and cartoons go beyond mere decoration. Good editorial page artwork invites thoughtful consideration of the issues raised in the op-ed. It often does this by communicating through symbols—concrete objects that represent an abstract idea (Figure 12.9 on the next page).

Your school mascot is a ready-made symbol for your entire school and school community. You probably do not need to label him. When a graduate of your school is killed in military action, your Viking or Fighting Fisherman or Atom Smasher can hold his headgear in his hand and bow his head in respect before a military grave.

Institutions and public figures are also frequently represented in editorial cartoons by symbols that most readers and viewers easily recognize, thus avoiding the need for labels. Political cartoonist Thomas Nast created the elephant as the Republican Party symbol and popularized the donkey as the Democrats' symbol and Uncle Sam as

Figure 12.7 An editorial illustration accompanies and supports an op-ed piece, while also adding visual interest.

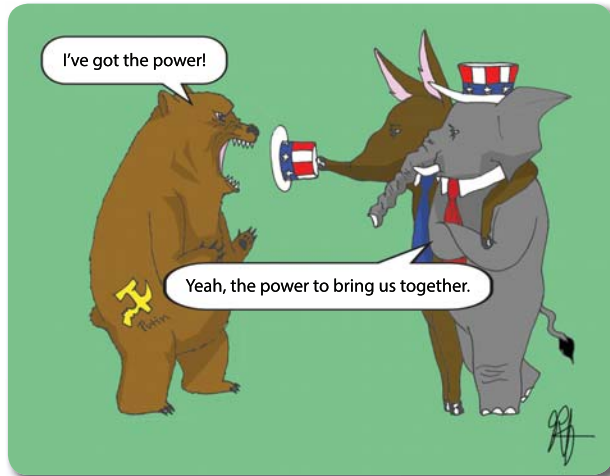
Figure 12.8 The wealthy who increase their worth by “down-sizing” companies are targeted in this editorial cartoon using two familiar tropes, the saying, “A mother’s work is never done,” and the image of Uncle Scrooge McDuck who had so much excess money he took daily swims in his money pile. Uncle Scrooge is a reference to Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol.”



Courtesy of David Horsey

a symbol for America. These stock symbols allow cartoonists to make critical comments in a simple drawing because these abstract ideas—the parties and the country—can be shown performing symbolic actions (Figure 12.10).

Figure 12.9 The use of strong visual symbols in this editorial cartoon allows the cartoonist to communicate a great deal without including much text.



Courtesy of Rachel Fung, The Broadview, Convent of the Sacred Heart High School

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Labels

The test of a good editorial illustration or editorial cartoon is how easily it communicates to the viewer or reader. Labels may be needed to make your illustration or cartoon clear to your audience. If in doubt, get responses from others on your staff and from several diverse readers to see if your meaning is clear.

Labels may be necessary on several parts of your cartoon. If you show your mascot cowering behind the post of a school building’s porch, wiping his forehead, weak with relief, while a runaway school bus careens away, you may need to label the bus to explain the disaster that your school has just avoided. “State School Budget” or “Drastic Budget Cuts” or “School Closures” makes clear the danger the mascot—and your community—has just escaped.

Caricatures

Political leaders, entertainers and other public figures are often drawn as caricatures (Figure 12.11). A distinctive feature—such as large ears, a prominent jaw or an extreme hairdo—is exaggerated. Public figures are fair game for an editorial cartoonist to criticize. The audience usually understands that when the governor’s caricature is shown throwing a grandma under a bus, especially if the grandma is labeled “Senior Citizens Programs,” the reference is to funding cuts. The cartoonist is not accusing the governor of murder (Figure 12.12 on the next page).



Figure 12.10 Debuting in an editorial cartoon by Thomas Nast in the late 1800s, the elephant and donkey have represented the political parties in the United States ever since.

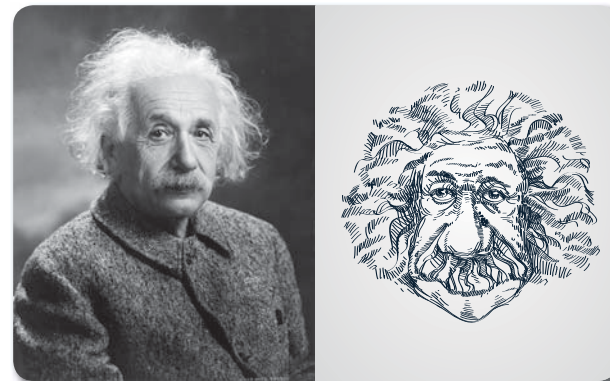


Figure 12.11 A caricature exaggerates features for a comical or satirical effect.

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Figure 12.12 Labels and dialogue in this editorial cartoon make clear to the audience what the symbols stand for. The school administration is criticized without being caricatured.

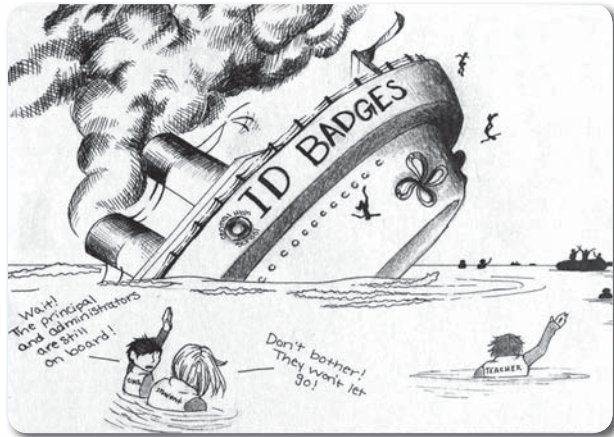


Image courtesy of National Scholastic Press Association (nspa.studentpress.org); cartoon by Anita Hodge, The Register, Central High School

However, private citizens are entitled to greater protection under libel laws, and a caricature may be a form of libel if the recognizable figure is shown doing something the person has not done—eating babies, for instance, even if the babies are labeled “campus day care” and the reference is to the principal’s closure of the child care class and the on-campus day care.

Metaphors and Allusions

Editorial cartoons and illustrations often use metaphors and allusions, relying on the audience’s familiarity with common stories, sayings and traditions to communicate abstract ideas.

A metaphor may use a concrete object or experience to illuminate an abstract idea. (The word *illuminate* in the previous sentence is an example. The “concrete object or experience” has become a lamp or a flashlight. The “abstract idea” has become a dark cave or room. Because of the concrete object or experience, the abstract idea is illuminated. The verb *illuminate* creates this implied metaphor.)

An allusion draws on your audience’s knowledge of another story or event. The reference to the story becomes a sort of shorthand for all the events, characters, emotions and morals associated with the story or event.

If a federal agency is about to limit access to an environmental zone where your cross-country team trains, a cartoon about it—perhaps titled “Snake in the Grass”—could show the legs of a runner in the tall grass of the environmental zone. A snake labeled with the federal agency’s name, coiled to strike at the runner’s legs, would be an allusion to the common saying “a snake in the grass.” The proposed federal action will injure the runner.



Figure 12.13 Get opinions, as many as you think necessary, to make sure that the majority of your audience will “get” your metaphors and allusions. The point of these references is to clarify and strengthen your message, not show off your vast knowledge.

Suppose a local community college offers your football team something that seems too good to be true—college credit for off-season weight training. But your publication has discovered that the summer weight training program will deplete most of your football budget if the players sign up.

In such a case, your editorial cartoon can portray the situation with a reference to Little Red Riding Hood. Most of your audience will recognize the story. A burly football player dressed like Little Red and the wolf in Grandma’s bed labeled with the name of the community college would make an allusion to a well-known fairy tale. (This allusion works even better if one of your school colors is red.) Or the weight training could be a Trojan horse, community college officials the Greeks and the high school football fund could be the city of Troy about to be raided.

Song lyrics, movies and books all help editorial artists communicate, but the artist and the section editors should use multiple responders to make sure most of the audience understands the references. An editorial cartoon is no place for an inside joke. Be sure to use a variety of responders to see what your cartoon communicates (Figure 12.13 above).



YOUR TURN

Clip or print three editorial cartoons or editorial illustrations: one that relies on labels, one that relies on symbols and one that relies on an allusion to a commonly known story or saying.

Chapter Twelve

Review and Assessment

Recall

- How do publications and broadcasts identify their editorial and opinion content so it will not be confused with news content?
- How do staff editorials differ from op-eds?
- What is the traditional shape of a staff editorial?
- In what way is a columnist's job like that of a beat reporter?
- How is a columnist's work similar to the work of a storyteller?
- What is meant by a columnist's voice and why is it important?
- Do columnists create their voice by writing how they speak? Support your answer.
- Name at least three advantages a journalistic blog has over a printed publication.
- True or False: Blogs do not require an editor. Support your answer.
- Why are labels important in editorial cartoons?

Critical Thinking

- Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting a staff editorial with an op-ed.
- Locate and print or clip two editorials about topics that interest you. Number the paragraphs for convenience as you discuss the work.
 - Explain how you know each is a staff editorial.
 - How long is each?
 - Identify the issue each is discussing.
 - What makes the issue timely?
 - What pronouns do the editorials use?
 - What background do the editorials provide?
 - How do they identify and rebut the opposition's argument?
 - What expert facts do they use?
 - What transitions do they use?
 - What is each editorial's position?
- Locate and print or clip two op-ed pieces. Number the paragraphs for convenience as you discuss the work.
 - How long is each?
 - Identify the issue each is discussing.
 - What makes the issue timely?
 - What pronouns do the op-eds use?
 - What background do the op-eds provide?
 - What does each writer hope to accomplish with the op-ed?
- Create a Venn diagram comparing a column and an op-ed. What is the most significant difference?
- Create a Venn diagram comparing a journalistic blog and a personal blog. What are the most important differences?

Application

Choose a campus issue of concern to you. Use the topic of your choice for exercises 1 through 8.

- Take a position on the issue you have chosen and write an outline of a staff editorial. Explain the content of the editorial to a response group.
- Take the same issue and create a rough draft of an op-ed arguing for the same position. Share the draft with a response group.
- Draft an opening for the op-ed using a strong subject-verb sentence.
- Write a *reductio ad absurdum* argument suitable for the staff editorial.
- Write hyperbole suitable for the op-ed.
- Use irony or satire suitable for your op-ed.
- Use repetition (at least three) suitable for your op-ed.
- Sketch an editorial cartoon on an issue important to you. Use labels as necessary. Share your cartoon with your response group. Ask how you can improve your cartoon.

Chapter Twelve

Journalism Style

Plurals of Letters and Abbreviations

- High schools are full of abbreviations and letters:
- I got an A!
 - The AP (assistant principal) broke up the fight.
 - ASB (Associated Student Body) ran the assembly.
 - I will have an AP (advanced placement) class next fall.
 - I'm taking the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT (originally, American College Testing) in March.

- They are abolishing SSR (Sustained Silent Reading).
 - Harry Potter passed an OWL (Ordinary Wizarding Level).
 - That was his best IM (Individual Medley) of the season.
- We also use numbers as nouns.
- He ran the 440 (the 440-yard dash) in record time.
 - Title IX (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972) requires that female athletes be given more opportunities.

What happens when we use these letters, abbreviations and numbers as plurals?
If you are writing the plural of a single letter, add an apostrophe and a lowercase s.

- Examples:**
- He loves the Oakland A's.
 - He received seven A's and two C's.
 - He learned his three R's: reading, writing and 'rithmetic.
 - Any U's in citizenship will hurt your chance of admission to the honor society.
 - He received O's in work habits and D's for grades.

When type was set by hand, printers could easily confuse the letters *p* and *q* because they were arranging type to print the mirror image of what they saw. This is possibly the origin of the saying, "Mind your *p*'s and *q*'s."

To express the plural of multiple letters, just add an s without the apostrophe.

Examples:

- The APs broke up the fight.
 - ASBs met in Santa Barbara.
 - Do you know the ABCs of journalism?
- Numbers are also made plural by adding an s.
- Examples:**
- His closet floor is littered with shoes he has outgrown—three pairs of 12s, two pairs of 13s and one pair of 14s.
 - His grandparents started a store in the 1950s.

Try It!

Which is correct?

- I will have two APs/AP's/APS in the fall: chemistry and world history.
- I am planning on getting 4s/4's or 5s/5's on both tests.
- I'm sitting for two SATs/SAT's/SATS before the application deadline.
- I like the University of California, and I'm applying at two UCs/UC's/UCS: UCLA and UC Berkeley.
- I hope colleges will overlook the two Ns/N's/NS I received my freshman year.
- Harry Potter passed all his OWLs/OWL's/ OWLS except astronomy.
- Those were his two best IMs/IM's/IMS of the season.
- He ran three league-record-breaking 440s/440's.
- We do not look for other Title IXs/IX's to even the playing field for other disadvantaged groups.

Extend Your Knowledge

Visit the *Journalism* website to find out the following:

- How to make the plural of proper names.

Example: *They are spending too much money trying to keep up with the Jones'/Joneses/Jones's.*

- How to make the plural of words used as words.

Example: *Her note of apology was filled with sorrys/sorry's/sorryes.*

Chapter Twelve

Writers' Workshop

In these Writers' Workshops you will:

- Create a chart to discover a pattern in a favorite columnist's work.
- Analyze the balance of first-person observations, interviews (including interviews with experts), other reporting, the columnist's personal experiences and the columnist's statements of opinion.
- Create a chart to discover the patterns in a strong opinion piece.
- Analyze the balance of first-person observations, interviews (including interviews with experts), other reporting, the writer's personal experiences and the writer's statements of opinion.

WORKSHOP 12.1

How Do They Do That?

Mini-Lesson: Following Your Leader

You've seen and perhaps used writing maps for breaking news, general news, features editorials, reviews and sports. Wouldn't it be great if there were a map to write a really great column?

Too bad. You probably won't find one because columns follow many patterns and extend too many different lengths. Two columns by one journalist may vary from each other almost as much as they do from the work of another columnist. The freedom is part of the joy—and terror—of writing a regular column.

But you can learn from columnists you enjoy or admire. In this workshop you will chart one or more columns. After you have analyzed your results, you will know more about what goes into a strong column, and you will be able to use your chart as a map for writing your own column.

Charting a Column

1. Print out or clip a column 20 to 30 paragraphs long—about 50 sentences.
2. Create a chart similar to the one on the next page, but skip the last column. (Yours will be only three columns wide, not four.)
3. Number each paragraph and put the numbers in column one.
4. In column two write a statement of the paragraph's mission, that is, what the columnist wants to accomplish in the paragraph or what point is made.

5. In column three mark the source of the information in the paragraph: **OB** = observation; **QI** = quotation from interview; **R** = reporting; **Ex** = expert source; **Col** = columnist's opinion; **PE** = personal experience (apart from the columnist's reporting). Discuss with your group any other sources—or abbreviations—you need and adjust the categories. (You do *not* need to copy the words of the column as in the example on the next page. Quotations from the column, by Sandy Banks of the Los Angeles Times, are included on this chart only to show you how to identify the paragraph's mission.)

Tallying and Analyzing the Results

1. In the chart you have created, count the number of paragraphs that come from each source. For example, your chart might list Observation: 12; Reporting: 5; and so on.
2. What can you conclude about how columns are reported? What percent of your column could have been written without leaving the newsroom?
3. What can you conclude from your tally about the way columnists communicate their opinions? How often does the columnist tell you what to think?

Comparing Results

Compare your results with those of others in your group.

1. Do you see a pattern in the mix of observations, quotations, expert sources, the columnist's personal experience and statements of the columnist's opinion?
2. Do columns share certain patterns about what comes first, second, third and at the end?
3. What advice would you, as a group, give to someone who wants to write a column for your publication or broadcast?

Apply It!

- S** On an appropriate topic of your choice, write a 500- to 1,000-word column using what you learned from this mini-lesson.

Paragraph's Number	Paragraph's Mission	Source	Columnist's Text (optional)
1	Sets the scene, introduces the van.	OB	The giant brightly colored van has become a familiar sight on the street outside Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School, just across from the Jordan Downs housing project in Watts.
2	Introduces two opposing sides, each trying to influence families.	OB	It's not as popular a destination as the roving <i>paletero</i> selling ice cream or the display of fluffy pink batches of cotton candy peddled on the street corner. But a medical team from Cedars-Sinai is working to change that.
3	Introduces the health care team in the van.	OB	
4	Gives background about van's services.	R	The van is part of a mobile program that provides free health services to low-income families from Skid Row south to Inglewood. A pair of vans makes regular rounds to more than two dozen schools, parks and social services centers. Children get their eyes checked, ear infections treated and immunizations updated.
5	Heart of story, nutritional advice is key to improving long-term health.	R	But in an area where 55 percent of teenagers are overweight or obese, its most important product may be health and nutrition advice, clearly explained and gently delivered.
23	Girl sullenly studies snacks, nurse urges water.	OB	
24	Girl pockets \$1, leaves.	OB	
25	Columnist calls it a standoff.	Col	I considered it more a standoff than a victory for the forces of good health. That dollar was likely burning a hole in Dafne's pocket. And there was another mother pushing another snack cart just around the block.

WORKSHOP 12.2

How Did the Op-Ed Writer Do That?

Mini-Lesson: Charting an Op-Ed

Opinion pieces are usually limited in length by editorial policy. Some publications keep them below 700 words; others, below 1,000. They always require strong, efficient writing and close editing.

They also tend to follow several patterns. You and your group will discover a few of these in this workshop.

Though they need not be as timely as a staff editorial, they address timely issues or concerns.

Compared to the freedom and wide open spaces available to a columnist, opinion pieces may feel confining, but they possess a power granted to few other types of writing. A strong op-ed piece may be "picked up" and reprinted in publications across the country and discussed in public forums and private meetings.

1. Choose an opinion piece from a professional publication that impresses you.
2. Chart the opinion piece as you did the column in Workshop 12.1.
3. Perform the analysis, paying particular attention to how narrative elements, that is, storytelling elements from personal experience or observation, are mixed with expert sources and statements of the writer's opinions.

4. Working with your group, discuss your findings:

- A. What elements are common in opinion pieces but rare in columns?
- B. What elements tend to start an opinion piece?
- C. What elements tend to end an opinion piece?
- D. If you colored in the narrative elements in the opinion pieces you charted, what parts of the pieces would be colored?
- E. What percent of an opinion piece could be written (if you had a good research library) without leaving the newsroom?
- F. What advice would you, as a group, give to someone who wants to write an opinion piece for your publication or broadcast?

Apply It!

- S** On an appropriate topic of your choice, write a 700- to 1,000-word op-ed. Use the chart you created for this mini-lesson as a writing map.

Extend Your Knowledge

The writer's tone, his attitude toward his subject, his audience and himself, also shapes op-eds and opinion columns. For a Writers' Workshop on handling tone, visit the *Journalism* website.