

Op-Ed Writing Assignment

It's time to get started writing your first draft of your op-ed on prisoner reentry.

Picking a Target

First, determine your top two target newspapers or magazines. Make sure they both run op-eds. Look at the current submission criteria for both of them.

Do some homework on them:

- Read through enough recent issues to give you a flavor for the politics of the publication. This would impact your angle. For instance, the same points would not be equally resonant with a libertarian and progressive magazine.
- What can you tell about the readership (geographical location, interest areas, education level, and/or professions)?
- Look especially at some recent op-eds. Do they ever run criminal justice op-eds?
- Recommendation: pick one op-ed and paste it into a word document. Check the grade level (as shown in class).

If your targets don't run op-eds on criminal justice, you may want to adjust your list.

If your two top targets appear different in their readerships or word limits, it may be best to adjust your list. That way if you're turned down from your top choice and want to submit to your second choice, you won't have to redo the piece to cater just to another publication's readership or word limits.

Writing the First Draft

Now it's time to build on your annotated bibliography to draft your op-ed.

Remember these areas we have been following in op-eds we've analyzing along with some tips below:

I. Is the point clear?

Be able to break your point into three or so short ideas. For instance, a made-up example:

1. we see advertisements at an early age and many times each day (stats, vivid example)/
2. TV advertisements are harmful to toddlers' brain development (research findings)/
3. we should lobby our representatives to pass laws that better regulate advertisements to support healthy brain development.

II. What is your expertise/ authority?

Your authority could come from your work experience, studies, and/or life experience. If using your life experience, remember that once published, any future employer can see it. If using your work experience, check before using the real names of any organization or person there.

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III. What is the data/evidence used?

What is common/ exceptional? Consider starting there. Also remember there are a lot of different kinds of evidence that you can use.

IV. Where is social science?

What is timely? Consider starting there. Keep in mind that you are writing for a lay audience (likely 8th or so grade reading level). The idea is to translate findings from social science without jargon. Emphasize recent examples or studies (the last 1-3 years) where possible. Also, emphasize consistent findings (more than 1-2 studies) where possible.

V. What is the rhetorical style (style of making an argument)?

Knowing the readership of the newspaper or magazine could influence the style you pick to make your point. It may not be as confrontational a publication as the post we read from the Washington Post blogger. It may not like government as much as the *USA Today* op-ed by Loretta Lynch.

The first draft should have your suggested headline, name, and word count at the top.

Bring your first draft to class for peer review on 3/27.

Good luck!