

## **Editorial Writing a series of 5 lesson plans**

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**Some material for this packet adapted from or borrowed outright from lessons found at the ASNE High School Journalism web page Lesson Plans sections on editorial writing.  
[http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson\\_Plans/Detail.cfm?lessonplanid=196](http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson_Plans/Detail.cfm?lessonplanid=196)**

## Writing Editorials

**1. Group to be taught: Grade 12** Advanced Communications class at Lafayette High School, St. Joseph, Missouri.

- One class of approximately 30 students in a dense middle to lower class area of town, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> is Caucasian, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> black.
- Most adults in the school's community have no education beyond high school, 2 percent achieved bachelors degree or above; mean household income is low (\$33,578); free and/or reduced lunch count for the district is 58.3%, above the state mean of 41.8%
- Aggregate test scores (ACT Comp and grade seven and eleven MAP Communication Arts) from 2000 – 2004 are at or slightly higher than the state's mean

**2. Overall purpose of the lessons:** Students will complete a newspaper editorial as an exercise in persuasive writing.

Students often have opinions but cannot communicate them effectively. In order to write well, students need to learn to formulate strong arguments and defeat opposing arguments without losing their focus.

The assignment will help them meet several of the Missouri's Communication Arts GLEs for high school: i.e. follow a writing process when composing a writing assignment, participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues and ideas, reading and evaluating nonfiction works and material (such as biographies, newspapers, technical manuals), writing formally (such as reports, narratives, essays) and informally (such as outlines, notes).

**3. Learning Outcomes:** As a result of completing these lessons, students will be able to:

- Use writing for research and brainstorming
- Provide meaningful feedback to peers about writing and thought processes
- Develop a persuasive piece with effective organization and voice
- Analyze and outline arguments and opinions.
- Answer questions: What makes an effective editorial? Why do people write editorials? Why do people read them? What influence do they have? What is their purpose in the newspaper? What are the possible repercussions of an editorial?

**4. List of materials needed:**

Exemplars of various editorials:

- Editorial pages from The Kansas City Star, The St. Joseph News-Press and the USA Today.
- Ferguson, D., Patten, J., Wilson, B., "Journalism Today 6th Edition" (Chicago: National Textbook Company) 2001.
- Hawthorne, Bobby, "The Radical Write" (Taylor Publishing Company) 1994.
- Student writing journals, hard copy or online. Entries are titled and dated.

**5. Instructional Practice Timeline:**

**A. Class Day One: Lesson One – 60 minutes** (focus on idea development and organization).

- Teacher and students read an example of an editorial from each paper.
- Class brainstorms topics of interest to the students.
- Students and teacher complete a 10 minute focus write in their journals to brainstorm on topics they might wish to develop.

**B. Class Day Two: Lesson Two – 60 minutes** (focus on idea development)

In groups of four students keep a list of the following:

- What topics are covered in each of the editorials?
- What purpose does each article seem to serve?
- Teacher puts a list of "Purposes Editorials Serve" on the overhead and the class brainstorms the list.
- Students form new pairs and identify/list on butcher paper three possible topics for a school paper for each "purpose" discussed in class. The writing on butcher paper should be large enough to be seen from 20 feet away. Post lists on wall.
- Discuss characteristics of effective editorials.
- For homework – write a journal entry on material covered in class that day.

**C. Class Day Three: Lesson Three – 60 minutes** (focus on idea development and some word choice)

- Students review the list of "Characteristics of good editorials." They decide if they need to add to or revise the list. (The main goal here is to refresh student memories of the list)
- Students form groups of three to four and each group is assigned a group letter. Within each group, students should be assigned a number 1-4. Groups are assigned a "purpose" from the class list that was created while reading editorials.
- Groups pick one topic listed under that purpose from the butcher paper lists on the wall.
- For homework - Journal writing on material covered in class that day.

**D. Class Day Four: Lesson Four – 60 minutes** (Focus on organization, word choice, and voice).

- Students, using the concrete detail and commentary graphic organizer, work for 20 minutes to research, outline, and plan a five-minute speech that logically achieves the purpose assigned.
- Before speeches begin, review audience behavior and develop a short list of characteristics we will be looking for. Discuss feedback techniques -- sandwiching improvement suggestions between compliments.
- Draw letters from a hat to determine which group goes first. One member of the group delivers the speech as their group's letter and individual number is drawn.
- Speech givers and their group receive written feedback from peers and instructor about how well their speeches meet the requirements of an effective editorial, as discussed in class.

- For homework - Students write the first draft of an editorial for the same topic as their speeches, incorporating any appropriate feedback they received.
- For homework - Journal writing on thoughts about class that day.

**E. Class Day Five: Lesson Five – 60 minutes** (Focus on organization, especially introductions for narratives).

- Ten minutes - Students trade editorials and give feedback.
- Twenty minutes are given for additional online research and developing draft number two.
- The final 30 minutes is spent smoothing over the final draft of the editorial. Students will turn in the final copy and their previous draft showing significant revision.

## **6. Student Writing Sample(s):**

### **First draft:**

A pet project, dear to my heart, came under fire in the "Letters to the Editor" section of last week's Griffon News. Apparently we have a faction on campus that finds the subject matter of Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues" objectionable and would prefer it not be performed at all.

I'm aware of other responses submitted that deal with a lot of things about the letter to the editor. As a co-organizer of the show, as well as one of the actresses, I wore a lot of hats on the projects, and I felt I should weigh in on this issue with one or two final thoughts.

To those who don't like the show – as this is a free country with the right to free speech I just want to thank you for your feedback on the performance. We would have liked to have you in our audience as we were raising money for an extremely worthwhile cause and the more tickets sold equals more money for the YWCA Shelter.

Here's a thought – next year start any letter writing to the Griffon News in the weeks before the production and perhaps more people will attend just to see what the fuss is about.

Keep in mind please that it's likely the show will go on again with or without your approval – at least it will as long as a couple of us are around. For those who didn't see it this time around ... you missed an incredible group of women, from all walks and backgrounds - even a couple of us with children of our own.

For those who do object -- see the show so you object from a position of knowledge. There is much more to it than "profanity and vulgar language." There are themes of love, loyalty, healing, joy and so much more.

Above all, remember that we're smart enough to know that no amount of letters will change your mind. We just wanted to be sure you know you won't be changing our's either.

### **Second Draft:**

A pet project, dear to my heart, came under fire recently. Someone wrote in who doesn't like the yearly benefit performance of "The Vagina Monologues."

That's fine.

It's his right...free speech and all that.

But he'd also like the campus to ban the play -- in the name of higher education and protecting our civilized society.

Now he wants to infringe on the rights of those of us who work to produce and perform the play as a benefit for needy organizations?

So much for civilized...

His criticism would mean more providing he'd actually seen the show -- instead of just quoting bits from negative reviews that haven't actually been in the script for years.

If you're going to object, at least do so from a position of knowledge.

Aside from a provocative title, there is much more to it than "profanity and vulgar language."

There are themes of love, loyalty, healing, joy and so much more.

For those who missed it, a diverse group of women had a good time for a great cause entertaining those who bought tickets – and no lap dancing was involved thank-you-very-much.

Here's a thought – next year start any letter writing to the Griffon News in the weeks before the production and perhaps more people will attend just to see what the fuss is about.

Above all, remember that we're smart enough to know that no amount of letters will change your mind. We just wanted to be sure you know you won't be changing ours.

### **Editorial Writing Assignment Checklist**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Potential editorial topic brainstorming list
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. List of editorial topics and purposes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. A 5 minute persuasive speech outline
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. A critique of peers speeches and arguments
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. A rough draft of editorial based on speech topic. (300-500 words)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. A final draft, showing revision (300-700 words)



# **Handouts for the Unit**

# Editorial Structure

## Purpose of an editorial:

- Primary: to persuade! If you can't take a stand, you do not have a good editorial
- Secondary: to inform and/or to entertain

## Topic Selection Criteria

- What's important?
- What's current?
- What's possible?
- Research- Important Step!
- use primary and secondary sources

## Structure

### Hook (Lead) has to invite readers in

30 words or less; 50 words or less OK if using anecdote, but split to 2 -3 paragraphs

### Four possible openings:

- anecdote- short story that makes a point
- question- usually rhetorical which tries to involve reader
- starting statistic/ fact
- description- to put the reader in a certain place/time

## Position Statement/Thesis Statement/ Main Idea

- one sentence statement on your position
- 2nd paragraph of story
- Concession
  - considers what the other side's strongest argument is and acknowledges it
  - example: "Certainly open campus can be dangerous for some students. However..."
  - makes this point quickly, then moves on to your position & details
- Supporting Details (one paragraph per detail, 1-2 sentences each)
  - each a short paragraph
  - put in order of your weakest to strongest arguments/ reasons/ details
  - finish with strongest
  - using facts, rather than opinion, for these details is much more effective
- Conclusion
- suggest a course of action
- remind reader of your opening hook in some way

**NOTE: Good editorials usually run 250-500 words in length.**

## It's All in the Lead

### What is a lead?

A lead is a simple, clear statement that makes up the first paragraph or two of your story. It advertised what is coming in the story.

**What is the first step in writing a lead?** The first step is determining a story's relevance.

**How do I determine a story's relevance?** Ask "So what?" or "Who cares?"

### What are the six basic questions that every story must answer?

- a) Who
- b) What
- c) When
- d) Where
- e) Why
- f) How

### How long should a lead be?

Leads should be short, usually fewer than 25 words. It varies, depending on style of story.

### What's an inverted pyramid?

The organization of a news story in which information is arranged in descending order of importance.

### Different types of leads:

There are many, but what follows are five types of leads:

- Immediate identification: This lead focuses on the "who" when it comes to the six basic questions. Use this approach when someone important is making news. For example:

**President George W. Bush ate a cheeseburger and fries with students  
Friday during a visit to Our High.**

- Delayed identification: In this lead, the "who" is not immediately identified by name. Instead, the "who" is identified by an occupation, city or job title. Use this approach when the person involved has little name recognition among readers.

**A cafeteria worker at Andrew Jackson High won \$2.5 million  
Friday in the state lottery.**

- **Summary:** The lead in this case is a synopsis of two or more actions. Reporters who deal with several important elements may choose to sum up what happened rather than highlight a specific action. This is one type of lead where a general statement is preferable to a specific action.
- **Multiple elements:** This lead reports on two or more newsworthy elements. In some stories, choosing one theme is too restrictive. A multiple-element lead allows the reporter to work more information into the first paragraph. (Use sparingly.)
- **Leads with flair:** Use this type of lead when you want to emphasize novelty. It deviates slightly from the inverted pyramid approach.

### **What should I avoid in a lead?**

There are no hard and fast rules, but remember:

**Too many numbers can bog down a lead.** You can tell readers how the numbers will affect them in your lead then provide details later in the story. For example, if prom tickets were \$50 per person last year and the price increased to \$75 per person this year, your lead could say:

**Seniors shouldn't spend that extra \$25 dollars on appetizers and dessert for dinner before prom—they'll need it to pay for tickets. The student council voted Friday to raise the price of prom tickets.**

A quote lead may not be the best choice. Quote leads often lack context. The reader doesn't know who is speaking or why it matters.

**Question Leads!** Don't start off with a question, that's too easy and the reader knows it.

Try not to start with dates, times or places ... unless those are the most important news. Start with people and what they are doing or have done.

#### **Bad Lead**

On Friday, July 15, 2001, three students won a statewide choral competition.

#### **Good Lead**

Three Our High juniors took home \$500 and top honors Friday in a statewide choral contest.

**This material was written by a group of teachers at the High School Journalism Institute at Hampton University in Hampton, Va., in 2001. The group consisted of Roland Noel, Molly Preble, Kimberly Brown-Boynton and Susan Ferguson.**