

Op-Ed

Arts 140

What's an op-ed? Op-eds are one way for citizens to contribute directly to debates in the media by publishing an informed opinion piece, traditionally location opposite the editorial page of a newspaper (hence “op-ed”). It is a short essay—typically 700-800 words—that makes and supports one primary argument. It also addresses or refutes counterpoints to this argument.

Audience (*who you are communicating to*)

You are writing your op-ed to the public – specifically to newspaper readers who are educated and interested in the climate crisis. You can assume some knowledge about climate change, but remember that your readers are *not* specialists. This means you should define technical terms or discuss complex concepts. Also remember that your readers are short on time and attention span. Make your points clearly and make an effort to keep the audience interested.

Assignment & Purpose (*what you want to achieve through this communication*)

Your aim is to make one clear argument—one clear statement of informed opinion, or a specific call for action—that you support with evidence, on one very specific issue relating to climate change. Here you are aiming to persuade your audience that your position is the correct one, and that competing positions are incorrect or somehow faulty.

Please follow the Op-Ed Guidelines below

Evidence & Sources. Feel free to draw on course readings, but primarily your evidence will come from material beyond the syllabus. This is your chance to use Jane Forgy’s advice on finding and discerning sources.

Citing. Op-eds usually don’t contain academic citations, but for this assignment, please include in-text citations and a reference list, following this APA style: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

Format & Due Dates

- 2 double-spaced pages maximum, following the “Paper Submission Template” on LEARN
- No cover sheets or folders, please
- Always use double-sided printing, please
- Draft 1 is due at the beginning of week 3’s class for peer review: bring three hard copies with you. Remember to upload it to the appropriate dropbox folder on LEARN as well.
- The final submission is due at the beginning of class in week 4. Submit a hard copy and upload your paper into the appropriate dropbox folder on LEARN.

Op-Ed Guidelines

Why write an op-ed?

- Influence the conversation / lead thinking
- Provoke debate
- Expose unintended consequences
- Promote research
- Bring diversity of viewpoints
- Bring more media attention to an issue

When?

- Topic is hot
- Something new to share (released report, research findings)
- Anniversaries/national days
- In advance of an event (“curtain raiser”)
- Event post-mortem

KEY PARTS OF AN OP-ED

1. **HEADLINE** (the title): Clear and precise; immediately gives a sense of your main point
2. **STRONG OPENING** (the introduction)
 - Hook the reader from the first line!
 - Make your main point at the very beginning of the op-ed. Tell immediately what it’s about.
 - Can be in the form of anecdote, quote, controversial/bald statement
 - Avoid formal presentations (“In this essay....”)
 - Avoid date/time openings (“On Dec. 5, in Montreal...”)
3. **CONTEXT**
 - Why should the reader care about this issue? This is the “so what?” question.
 - Why are you writing about this right now?
 - Historical/statistical context for the piece
4. **MAIN POINTS** (2-3 max)
 - One thought/idea/point per section, supported by evidence.
 - Always relate back to premise!
 - Each section has clear beginning and end
 - Ensure logical flow of points
5. **CONCLUSION**
 - Can be short
 - Echo the introduction
 - Cast forward into the future: what is the next consequence or step?
 - Provide a deeper reflection

Writing Standards

- Make one primary argument; convey one precise message
- Use plain language (avoid academic or industry jargon)
- Be concise and succinct – make every word and every sentence count
- Craft well-organized paragraphs with strong topic sentences: use strong transition phrases or words to guide the reader through your thinking
- Be precise: use concrete examples, exact data, and/or compelling stories to support your point. Strong op-eds (and blogs) are based on evidence, either quantitative or qualitative.
- Read it out loud for flow and sentence-level details—professional op-eds (and blog posts) are cleanly edited
- Use the first person. A personal connection draws interest to your piece

- Sources: Feel free to draw on course readings, but your evidence will come mainly from material beyond the syllabus. This is a chance to use Jane Forgay's advice on finding and discerning sources.
- Citing: Op-eds and blog posts usually don't contain formal academic citations, but for these assignments, please include in-text citations and place a reference list at the very end of your post, following this APA style: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

Op-Ed Peer Review Guide Sheet

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Your name (the reviewer): _____

Author's name: _____

Step 1: Browse/skim the op-ed for a broad understanding.

Peruse the op-ed, focusing on the opening, conclusion, and topic sentences to get a general sense of the main points.

Step 2: Read it closely.

This time, make notes in the margins outlining the key idea in each paragraph. Jot down a few words that capture the main idea of each.

Step 3: Assess the op-ed using the grid below.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The opening "hooks" the reader from the first line and immediately tells the main point			
The op-ed includes a brief context of the issue, indicating why it is important / where it came from			
The main points of the op-ed clearly relate back to the main argument and are supported by convincing evidence			
The conclusion "closes the loop" of the essay and leaves the reader with a satisfying send-off			

Step 4: Return the annotated paper and your comments to the author. Discuss your review with the author.

Give her/him a chance to respond and ask questions.