Opinion Editorial

Assignment Description

Members of any community (nations, states, cities, neighborhoods, even families) have to communicate in order to conduct business, and much of that communication takes place in public forums. Today, those public forms include older media (like print newspapers or speeches or even pamphlets) as well as more modern forms (blogs, videos, podcasts, and web forms of traditional modes). Often, we seek to communicate in ways that establish a clear position and attempt to persuade others to adopt our position or to take action based on our position. That’s when the opinion editorial genre comes into play.

Your Purpose

As its name suggests, the opinion editorial asks you to establish an opinion (or a claim, in other words) and to support that opinion in a way that will persuade others to agree with you and, perhaps, to take action or to change their beliefs. You will need to thoroughly study an issue, identify a claim you want to make about the issue, and gather relevant evidence to help support your claim. Although we call this an opinion editorial, it’s actually an argument that you build meant to persuade an audience.

Your Topic

The opinion editorial genre can be applied to many topics, and I’d suggest that you choose a topic that matters to you and to a broader group (who will become your audience). This could be something relevant to university students in general or here at BYU, to members of your generation, or to a group of other citizens joined by a common interest or goal. The topic should be a current issue (think kairos) and one that you’ll be able to research (reading other people’s views as published in traditional or more modern media as well as gathering evidence from reputable sources if appropriate).

Your Audience

The audience for your opinion editorial will depend on the topic you choose. An argument about the way government should operate (i.e., a policy claim) might apply to all Americans; an argument about student loans could apply to university students, to their parents, or to taxpayers who help subsidize those loans (or to all three!). It’s critical that you understand your audience in this case because the rhetorical strategies you choose will need to be appropriate for that audience as well as for the claim you’re establishing. Reading opinion pieces written by other members of the audience will help you do this, and we’ll work specifically in class on tools for analyzing and thinking about our audience.

Format

Opinion editorials appear in a variety of forms (letters to the editor, newspaper editorials, blog posts, even video op-eds), but we’ll stick with a traditional essay format that could (with some minor adjustments) appear on a blog or in the opinion section of the newspaper or magazine. Your opinion editorial should be double-spaced, have a title, feature 1” margins, and use a 12-point serif font (like Times New Roman); your piece should be 3-4 pages long.

Considerations

Here are some things to keep in mind as you proceed in writing your opinion editorial and some hints for completing the assignment.

* In your previous assignment (the rhetorical analysis), you practiced some of the thinking that will go into making choices for your opinion editorial. Although now it’s *you* who will be the one making and supporting a claim, the same advice about rhetorical strategies and choices will apply. We’ll review in class, and you should revisit on your own, those chapters in *Mindful Writing* that talk about argument, character, and emotional appeals (as well as style).
* You’ll have an intended audience for your argument, and recognize that in that audience will be those who disagree with you and will have counter-claims for your argument. Anticipate those by talking to other people about your claim and where they might disagree with you. Be prepared to address those counter-claims in your opinion editorial.
* Once you’ve got a claim established, make sure you analyze the evidence you’re presenting and identify the underlying assumption that connects your claim and evidence. You can use this assumption in a number of ways, including stating it explicitly as a way of tapping into shared values or using it to help you address a counter-argument to yours.

**Planning**

As you create a plan for tackling this project, consider how your experience with previous writing projects can inform the approach you take to this project. The prompts below will help with this, but you should also review chapter two of *Mindful Writing* for more discussion of how we plan to write.

* What goals do you have based on the reflection you wrote for the previous paper? What lessons did you learn in the previous assignment that would make sense to transfer to this one?
* What is the rhetorical situation for this writing project? (it’s outlined for you above) So what are some thoughts you have about how you’ll choose an argument to analyze? What specific choices might you make to approach this audience?
* What stands out to you as most important as you read the assignment description? What do you want to be sure to remember as you draft and revise? How can you turn this into a goal about the product (the paper itself) or what you do while you’re writing (the process)?
* Consider the process you’ve used before as a writer. What are your strengths? What’s a specific goal you’ll make for this writing process based on your strengths? What’s one of your weaknesses as a writer? What’s a goal you can make to address that weakness?