

How to write an editorial

1. Structure

What is your hook? Start with an interesting beginning that reflects your views/angle to capture readers' attention. (See Text Openers, p. 80.)

State your main contention clearly and in a forthright tone.

State your reasons in order of priority and support your reasons with reference to an expert, survey and real-life experiences.

Include a comparison or analogy to support your views. (See p. 28.)

Write a rebuttal criticising the views of opponents. You may launch your discussion with an attack, presented as a problem (analyse the shortcomings of a scheme or proposal) and then offer a preferred solution. Or you may start with your views and end the discussion with the attack. (See pp. 61-63.)

Conclude in an assertive tone — perhaps with an imperative sentence or a question to make readers think about your message.

2. Style and tone

Do not use the first person pronoun — only the third person. You may use the inclusive pronoun, “we” to include readers in the discussion.

Use a sensible, forthright and moralistic tone so as to establish your authority. Frequently, the editor speaks on behalf of groups that lack a voice or power, and defends society's values.

3. Sentences

Use a formal style and Standard Australian English, including correct grammar and punctuation. (See p. 44.)

Avoid contractions (“we’d”; “shouldn’t”). Use a variety of sentence structures. Insert short, simple sentences to signpost your argument and reinforce your main points.

Paragraphs — *Journalists tend to write short paragraphs that suit the narrow width of newspaper columns.*

Use some repetition and parallel phrases for a sophisticated effect.

4. Word choice and purpose

Include:

- appeals to emotion and common sense to engage both the hearts and minds of your readers;
- some figurative language such as a pun, metaphor or idiom to draw attention to your main ideas; (See pp. 44-50.)
- some stern words of advice;
- some words with negative connotations that reveal a critical stance towards your opponents; and
- some colloquial words for a contrast.

6. Design

What layout features will you use?

Some editorials are written in one column; some in multicolumns. Sometimes they embed an image, which relates to the main contention.

Quick guide:

1. Start with a quote from a well-known spokesperson, statistics or anecdotal evidence which places the issue in a context.
2. Show a link to your main contention.
3. Outline your contention in a forthright and/or moralistic tone. Establish your position as the defender of the common good.
4. Outline your first reason and support it with the findings from a survey. Appeal to the reader's common sense.
5. Give your second reason. Use a case study or real-life example. Appeal to the reader's emotions.
6. State the opponent's views. Give firm reasons explaining why they are wrong.
7. Conclude with a forceful statement and a reminder that yours is the only “right” and “proper” course of action.