

# OPINION WRITING

# 7



*Pursue your work with gusto and passion. If you're a columnist, or an opinion writer, do your homework. Outrage will only carry you and your reader so far. Live, read, research and talk to as many real people as you can. Write thoughtfully and provocatively, with clarity and conviction. Then, when you're done, find a littler corner, read your draft out loud and see if it induces a smile, laughter, tears or rage. If so, you just might be on to something.*

*James Ragland, Columnist, Dallas Morning News, Dallas, Texas*



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter you will be able to:

- understand the different types of opinion writing
- brainstorm for editorial ideas
- develop and write an editorial
- investigate a variety of forms for opinion pieces
- understand basic goals and considerations of review and column writing
- explore the variety of styles employed in column and review writing.

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FROM FACEBOOK POSTS ABOUT STUDENT council elections, to blogs about girls' makeup, from *American Idol* voting to YouTube dress code rants – mass media provides teenagers with bountiful opportunities to voice opinions. The impulsive comments tagged onto an online story about banning backpacks at school have value because they give the reader a gauge of the community's views on the issue. Genuinely convincing opinion writing, however, requires that writers use the tools of informed argument.

While a news writer's role is to inform objectively, the opinion writer's purpose is to inform and persuade. Opinion stories – editorials, columns, blogs, reviews – all provide an outlet for writers to share their personal insights with the reader. The opinion writer can combine the skills of a dogged reporter, a perceptive scholar, a keen observer and passionate advocate, to bring insights to an issue, an event or the course of everyday life. An opinion writer can educate consumers, help a community grasp a complicated problem, rally citizens to an issue or publicize the perspectives of the voiceless or underrepresented.

An opinion piece is only as strong as the writer's thorough knowledge of the subject. Opinion writers who talk to multiple sources and explore multiple sides of an issue develop persuasive arguments that give readers insight. Let's return to the backpack ban scenario discussed above. Readers will only gain so much insight from one sophomore's angry, knee-jerk response to the ban. A serious opinion writer won't dismiss the girl's reaction, but might put it in a broader context of opinions and facts.

An informed opinion writer does not base her reporting and understanding of the subject to the views of one source. The writer should understand the basics about the ban by seeking the ban's creator and asking key questions. Were the facts in the story accurate? Who initiated the ban? What was the basis for it? The writer should also seek out the school security guard who can explain the difficulties of searching huge backpacks every morning to assure student safety. The assistant principal can tell the writer about how the halls get dangerously clogged by the extra bulk on the backs of nearly 1,400 students. A 102-pound honor student who struggles to lift her back-breaking load of books might offer a personal perspective on the argument over the ban. All of these insights should help inform and complicate the writer's own opinion on this subject. Whatever stance the writer now takes on the issue, the opinion piece will reflect multiple perspectives and a solid grounding in the facts.

## “ WORDS of WISDOM

*Anyone can rail on public displays of affection in the hallways or school dress codes. And every staff has that guy who wants to explain how to solve the crisis in the Middle East because he's a whole lot smarter than most 18-year-olds. But what a reader of a high school publication really wants is a columnist who has the guts to be honest. A columnist who isn't afraid to give something up about herself. Who will admit to the awkwardness of trying on bras while shopping for back-to-school clothes with mom. Or admitting what it felt like to be cut from the sophomore baseball team. As readers, we know what it's like to be in an embarrassing situation, or to have to face failure or broken dreams. We find out that we're not alone. The universal theme of the column keeps us coming back each issue. And that's how a columnist builds readership. Give. Of. Yourself.*

Scott Winter, Assistant Professor, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Nebraska–Lincoln



## opinion | letters

## Forum

Dear *Spark*,

I recently was reading the Pulse Journal and I was astonished to see names of teachers in local school districts with the salaries of those teachers. This floored me because I feel that this is private information that should not be shared with the general public.

The local school districts included: Butler Tech, Fairfield City Schools, Kings Local Schools, Lakota Local Schools, Little Miami Schools, Mason Schools, Warren County Career Center and Wayne Local Schools. From all of these school districts the newspaper only listed those who earned a salary above \$65,000. And out of these school districts the one with the highest paid employees was Mason City Schools. Having this private information out in the open makes me second guess becoming a teacher in one of these school districts. This information should remain confidential; information like a person's salary should not be exposed especially published in a local newspaper. This is just wrong.

I cannot believe how privacy has vanished; I guess it is just a sign of the times. One should not be able to look in the local newspaper and see a list of names and teacher salaries. Whatever happened to confidentiality and privacy?  
—Olivia Lepper, East sophomore

Dear *Spark*,

I am very impressed with your publication. This is my first year as a *Spark* subscriber and I believe that each issue is better than the last.

This publication has proved that it can report on light topics, such as sleep and dieting, to very serious topics, such as school budgeting, drug use and even same-sex marriage, with a high level of maturity and sophistication.

With great informational graphics and photos to accompany these amazing stories, I am incredibly impressed with not only the publication but also with the hard work put in by



these students every day. I cannot wait for more issues of this astounding publication.

—Jan Castro, East sophomore

Dear *Spark*,

I feel that *Spark* articles are interesting to an extent, but I would target the main articles more towards my age group, considering that this is a school magazine and the main readers are students.

For example, the Nerf wars issue last year was very interesting because we have seen it happen and frankly we would like to know a little more. We want to know about stuff like how many car accidents are Lakota East students involved in every year. It would show us if there needs to be more enforcement in teaching students how to drive.

There are only a few issues that are actually worth reading and spark my interest. You do a great job on your articles each issue, but I don't feel that they spark interest in student minds.

Maybe it does for an older group, but not for the main readers.

—Dustin Miller, East junior

Dear *Spark*,

*Spark* needs to survey students about smoking weed again because I don't think there are many people who do not smoke weed at our school.

Also the school should bring back the regular cola because ever since they replaced it with diet cola in the vending machine I haven't been buying as many as I used to buy. Plus, they raised the price from \$1 to \$1.25, and I need to bring in an extra 25 cents to school for a pop, which is very inconvenient.

—Daniel Mansdorfer, East junior

## GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

The *Spark*, which provides an open forum for students, faculty, subscribers and community members, encourages letters to the editor. Letters can be sent to the publication at the address below or dropped off in the journalism classroom (room 118). Letters must be signed, and the staff reserves the right to edit letters for length, grammar, invasion of privacy, obscenity or potential libel. The Opinion Editors will contact letter writers for confirmation.

*Spark*  
c/o Lakota East High School  
6840 Lakota Lane  
Room 118 attn: Opinion Editor  
Liberty Township, OH 45044  
Phone: (513) 759-8615 ext 15118  
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## Spark Notes

The first ever issue of *Spark* debuted on Dec. 18, 1992. It was the first medium in which Lakota High School students could express themselves.

Unlike today's vibrant and illustrative *Spark*, the first issue was black and white and contained only one graphic and 20 pages.

The origin behind *Spark*'s title is explained in this issue. The idea was that its purpose was to

spread a new idea like "wildfire" and that action is sparked through the power of the written word.

An important story in this issue was about the change in grading scale from a 10-point scale to a seven-point scale. The issue included an infographic about other school districts that had similar grading scales, including Indian Hill, Princeton and Mariemont.

4 | *Spark* | April 27, 2010

Printed opinions have generally been split into two categories: the editorial and the column. In most magazines or newspapers, the **column** is the opinion of one person, while the **editorial** is frequently the opinion of a group of people.

For an editorial, a group of people – usually called **the editorial board** – discusses and debates the issue to arrive at a position and an argument for it that represents the perspective of the publication. An individual writer, often the board member most passionate or knowledgeable about the subject, will craft the story, bringing drafts back to the board to see that the editorial represents their views. To reinforce the idea that the editorial represents the entire publication – and not just the writer – a byline is often omitted. However, the editorial

**FIGURE 7.1** *Spark*, Lakota East High School, Liberty Township, Ohio. Reproduced with permission of Dean Hume.

Good opinion sections encourage and offer space for reader response through letters to the editor and comments posts on websites. *Spark* provides a strong forum for public discussion of student-relevant issues. The letters include the author's name which helps assure that the letter is legitimate. Some publications require, but won't publish, a phone number with each letter to the editor to assure the validity, as well as to follow up if edits need to be made.

## WWW

**WEBLINKS** Check out [www.opinionjournalists.org](http://www.opinionjournalists.org)

The website provides links to opinion writers' blogs and resources for examples and reporting sources.

### Test your knowledge

What's an editorial board?

page should be clearly labeled as such, and editorials are often set off by a different format or design, to help distinguish them from neutral news reporting. In high school newspapers, where the readers may not be aware of the differences between an editorial and straight news reporting, editorials are sometimes labeled with "our opinion" or "an opinion based on 11-2 editorial board vote." (The argument against printing the vote count is that the revelation of a lack of unanimity weakens an opinion piece written to stand for the entire publication.)

An opinion column is often accompanied by a picture of the writer to help distinguish it as an opinion piece and to help the readers make a more personal connection to the columnist. In professional publications, well-known columnists are often featured on the front-page of a sports, local news or feature section. The **op-ed page**, or the page opposite the editorial, often features a number of columns as well. Sometimes editorial board members who don't agree with the other board members are given space on the op-ed page to share their opinions. The editorial or op-ed page will often feature reader feedback through letters to the editor.

## DEVELOPING EDITORIAL IDEAS

The chatter in the hallway minutes before first bell is loud and angry today. The late morning freeze iced over the untreated sidewalks and parking lots. Junior Anna Petrow complains about how she fell twice as she shuffled toward the back school entrance. Senior Emma Pennington thinks she bruised her tailbone when she fell. The group is demanding answers to their questions.

"Why didn't anyone put salt on the sidewalks?"

"Why wasn't there a snow day?"

"Does anyone realize people are going to get hurt?"

This scenario should also raise an important question for the student journalist: Is there an editorial here?

Maybe. The first clue should be that kids are talking about this issue. There's certainly a news story if students are getting hurt. Often where there are news stories, there is also a potential editorial.

Like good reporters, opinion writers should start asking questions to understand their subject. The answers to these questions can become the basis for an opinion piece. In this case, basic questions might include: what is the standard procedure for salting the sidewalks during winter storms? Was it followed here or not? How are the decisions about snow-day school cancelations made? What are the criteria? If students are injured due to the ice, who would be legally liable? Answering these questions can be pursued through interviews and research.

After talking to the superintendent, the column writer may craft a story about how difficult deciding to call a snow day can be. The editorial writer should not assume that the custodians were to blame but instead talk to them directly. The custodians may explain that budget cutbacks left them without a full staff for the morning shift and they were able to cover only the front parking lots with salt in the time allotted. The editorial writer may then decide to argue for full custodian shifts, the impact of which parents and students may not have previously grasped.

Again, good editorial writers seek out multiple viewpoints and take the information back to the board before deciding on a final stance. The information may come from both the editorial writer's interviews and those of the news writers – who may use the material for an objective story. The editorial writer should be prepared to take drafts back to the board repeatedly to get feedback and assurance that the piece still reflects the board's focus and opinions.

### Quick Exercise

Pair up with another student and develop a list of five school-relevant issues that could be covered in an editorial.

## ROLE OF THE EDITORIAL

As teenagers mature into adulthood, they may see themselves as having no say in society and government. The editorial can represent these "voiceless" individuals.

Editorials give individual teenagers a chance to strengthen their voices through a larger group and have it heard by their entire school community. A mature, thoughtful, well-argued editorial can go a long way toward discrediting the idea that young people should be seen and not heard.



# IN ACTION

## Editorial ideas

High school publications can publish editorials on a wide variety of subjects. Student editorial writers should use the following list of examples to help brainstorm ideas relevant to their own school community:

- A congratulatory editorial to the fans for changing their ways and creating a positive atmosphere while cheering for the basketball team. (This change came after the school neared state sanctions for unsportsmanlike chants against rival schools.)
- An editorial calling for the administration to get student announcements back on the P.A. system, to make sure students hear about important events. (The administration had been allowing teachers to read the announcements themselves or show them in a PowerPoint presentation.) The editorial board argued that many teachers didn't understand the new technology or forgot to read the announcements in class.
- After a year of school budget cuts in the midst of a state and national economic crisis, one paper's editorial board called for a personal finance class as a graduation requirement, to help students understand how to handle their own finances wisely.
- After learning of a neighboring schoolwide community service efforts in which 800-plus students prepared 16,000 meals to send to Africa, renovated a homeless shelter and removed invasive plants from wetlands, the publication asked that their own school follow that lead. The editorial called for a "school-wide social action day so students can actively learn about problems in the community and work together to solve them."
- A school called for improving student-teacher communication by asking teachers to conduct anonymous class evaluations or by putting up suggestion boxes. The editorial asked that students approach teachers with respect. The editorial explained to teachers that these forms of communication would help when lectures weren't entirely clear or let the teachers know when their constant teasing was hurtful.

The editorial board should understand that they speak for the greater public good. Potentially, a board member may personally dislike a stance but may agree to the editorial when he understands the end result will be best for all the readers.

## OPINION VS. FACT

All journalists should understand the basic distinction between fact and opinion. Facts are verifiable statements of truth. They are pieces of information that can be checked out and agreed upon. Opinions are subjective. They reflect personal beliefs that can vary with the individual. For example, "the sky is black" is a purported statement of fact, whether true or false. "The sky is scary," is an opinion, because it only describes a subjective experience that not everyone shares. While one person may cringe at the lightning that ripples across the sky, another may enjoy this dramatic sight of nature in action.

The pursuit of facts, through interview and research, is not only important to straight news stories, but is crucially important in opinion writing. Facts are the primary means by which the opinion writer should defend and uphold an argument.

Of course, all statements promoted as facts may not be. What some advocates call a fact, others may see differently. It is the responsibility of a good opinion writer to check each assertion of fact and assess its validity.

## EDITORIAL WRITING: THE FORMULA

Editorial writing is often taught as a step-by-step formula. This formula typically includes the following:

- 1 **The editorial lead.** The lead usually is one of two types. One type establishes the opinion first, either directly, through a description or contrast or as the result of a brief

## Quick Exercise

Identify whether each of the following sentences is a fact, an opinion or a blend of both. In sentences identified as an opinion, identify which word makes the sentence subjective.

- 1 The band won a school-record 10th Stradinger Lake Band Festival championship.
- 2 Kat's Kafe serves a tasty pecan pie for \$3.
- 3 School board president Ebony Moore lost the election by 27 votes.
- 4 The offensive line played poorly in Friday's game.
- 5 After 20 years in the classroom, Mr. Logan Heley has become a dedicated science teacher.

summary argument. Background on the issue is often woven into the lead paragraphs or immediately follows the lead. The other type of lead starts with background on the issue first and then builds to a statement of the writer's position on the issue. Either approach can be effective, depending on the topic.

- 2 **Clear position statement.** This statement usually appears early in the editorial, often in or immediately after the lead. The position statement is a straightforward articulation of the editorial's focus and the author's opinion on it.
- 3 **The argument.** Within the body of the story, the writer makes and develops key points to defend the position statement. The points should draw on factual research and a clear explanation of the writer's reasoning.
- 4 **Refuting the opposition.** A good opinion writer takes time to understand all sides of an argument. In this section, the writer demonstrates an intelligent and open-minded consideration of all sides, but goes on to explain why the other views are inadequate, mistaken or misguided.
- 5 **Solution.** Anyone can complain. The editorial writer should take a leadership role, just as a superintendent, principal or lawmaker would, and seek to find a feasible solution to the problem or issue facing the school or community.
- 6 **Conclusion or call to action.** In the concluding paragraphs, the opinion writer should end with a strong summary statement of her argument. The writer may also offer readers suggestions about what action they might take with regard to the issue.

## EDITORIAL LEADS

To find the editorial lead, the editorial writer should identify the heart of the opinion that speaks to the readers and engages them in the issue.

Although the purpose of the editorial differs from the news and feature story, an opinion writer can use many of the same strategies to capture the reader's interest that were discussed in earlier chapters. Opinion leads may be straightforward statements, summaries, descriptions or contrasts. What distinguishes the editorial lead is the need to quickly establish the opinion and the reasoning behind it. As in the sample leads provided below, some do so in the first sentence. Others start with background or provide context before building to a position statement.

Drinking under the age of 21 is against the law. This fact is commonly known throughout the public. But it is also widely acknowledged that for high school and college students to drink

under the age is not an anomaly by any stretch of the imagination. The first provision of the two-part law states that underage drinkers in Illinois may have their driver's licenses suspended without any involvement with a car or driving: the second stipulates that sober underage drivers with intoxicated underage drivers may also suffer license suspensions. While this recently passed law attempts to fulfill the worthy goal of curbing underage drinking, it goes about that goal in an irresponsible way.

*Lion, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Ill.*

The opening lines of this lead give some background on the issue, but when the writer points out that law-breaking students aren't an anomaly, he starts to suggest his stance. The closing sentences of the opening graph provide more information and also build to a clear and thoughtful position statement.

At home, most parents don't notice what books the students are reading in their English classes because students either don't bring home their books or their parents trust the school in their choice of reading material, which they should. But when the parents do notice what their students are reading, what follows next could be potentially negative, unnecessary and waste of time.

*The Update, H.H. Dow High School, Midland, Mich.*

The strength of this lead lies in its direct approach to the key reasons for leaving reading list choices to the schools and English teachers.

The scene is reminiscent of Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

A name is called. Silence. No one responds.

The process repeats again and again until one lone student walks across the stage.

The Academic Breakfast took place on Thursday, April 7.

Out of a total of 461 awards that were supposed to be given out that day, only 139 students showed up to accept.

Barely 30 percent showed up at a breakfast meant to recognize and honor their achievements.

Granted, some students who were supposed to be recognized were away on a band field trip. Assuming they would have shown up, that only slightly bumps up the percentage of attendance.

Around one of every three students were invited to the awards ceremony, got a free meal and received an award.

While this is not unexpected or unusual in any way – student have been skipping this breakfast for years – it is still wrong.

*Tiger Print, Blue Valley High School, Stillwell, Kan.*

The descriptive lead isn't used as often with editorials as it is with feature stories. However, the opening of this piece vividly depicts the poorly-attended award ceremony that is the focus of the opinion piece. "Silence," "no one responds" and "one lone student," all build to the stunning fact that out of 461 awards, only 139 were picked up in person. The writer finishes the lead with a clear position statement: although historically the event has been poorly attended, the students' snubbing of the ceremony is wrong.

The STA and Sion rivalry has gone too far.

The fighting between the schools has leaked beyond our sports arenas and academic fields and has taken a whole new life. It is malicious. It is wrong, and frankly, it is a little hypocritical.

STA prides itself on loving "neighbor to neighbor without distinction," but did we ever consider that our neighbors might extend beyond our own campus? It is hypocritical of us to take such pride in our motto when we stop treating our own sister school with decency. And yes, they are our sister school.

*The Dart, St. Teresa's Academy, Kansas City, Mo.*

HELPFUL  
TIPS

## Other considerations for editorial writing

- ← Editorial writers often use “we” to remind the reader that the story speaks for the newspaper or the board.
- ← Good editorial writers deal with issues, not personalities. Maturity and restraint should prevail when an editorial board evaluates each issue. For example, a new school board policy should be the focus of critique – not the demeanor of the principal whose job is to enforce it.
- ← A thoughtful, balanced editorial tone should avoid any hint of ranting or sarcasm. A writer can be passionate about a topic but should still appeal to the reader’s sense of reason and civility.

## Quick Exercise

Pair up with another student and make a quick list of three points you’d want to research from one of the five school-relevant issues you identified as potential editorials in the Quick Exercise on page 168.

The lead offers a simple and strong opinion statement. The last line of the second paragraph outlines the main arguments. The writer’s comparison of the school’s motto with its students’ actions builds to a particularly striking charge of hypocrisy.

## DEVELOPING THE ARGUMENT

The body of the editorial provides specific reasoning, to convince the reader of the writer’s stance. The editorial writer can’t act like a parent who explains an opinion with, “Because I said so.” The reader will want to know *why* the editorial reaches the conclusions it does. Good editorial writers explain and analyze their reasoning. They teach with background information and prove points with verifiable facts. The editorials broken down in this section provide good examples of how various high school publications have approached the craft of opinion writing.

The examples provided below draw on the structure from the “editorial formula” discussed earlier. Notice, however, how these writers use vivid and concrete language and examples, and devise creative ways to develop logical arguments. Even though editorials often follow a basic formula, the writing doesn’t have to be formulaic.

## EDITORIAL CARTOON

An **editorial cartoon** is any drawing, usually humorous or caricatured, that represents an opinion on a newsworthy issue. While editorial cartoons may not play the same prominent role as they did in 20th-century newspapers, such cartoons are still an effective way to deliver a direct, poignant and clear opinion to the reader.

Consider the following points when developing an editorial cartoon:

- Write out a clear opinion or perspective to be illustrated by the cartoon.
- Brainstorm with sketches of the cartoon. Don’t settle for the first idea.
- Try out the cartoons on others who are unfamiliar with the issue. Ask, “What do you take from this cartoon?” or “What’s the artist saying with this cartoon?” Follow up by asking, “How did you come to that conclusion?” The answers, even though they may not be the ones you want to hear, may create starting points for new and improved sketches.
- Most editorial cartoons are single-panel cartoons getting across the punch-line within a single frame, unlike the comic strip which tells a story over multiple panels.
- Editorial cartoonists often use a brief caption or speech bubble to reinforce their visual point. The caption wording must be tight and sharp. Don’t settle for your first caption. Brainstorm others and pick the best.

## WWW

**WEBLINKS** Check out  
[www.markfiore.com](http://www.markfiore.com)

This website from Pulitzer-Prize winning editorial cartoonist Mark Fiore offers up examples of animated short political cartoons that he regularly posts on the Internet.

## WWW

**WEBLINKS** Check out  
<http://editorialcartoonists.com>

This website offers a wealth of examples of recent and award-winning editorial cartoons. Students can study the concept and art of professional and student work from across the country.



# opinion

HARVARD-WESTLAKE SCHOOL □ VOLUME XIX □ ISSUE 1 □ SEPT. 9, 2009



## Step away from the Skittles

**W**e are choosing the hard right not the easy wrong, we understand that just because we can doesn't mean we should and that character not circumstance makes the person, but this has gone too far. This is the Pixie Stick that broke the camel's back. We want our candy.

A ban on soda and candy in both campuses' cafeterias has been adopted for the students to learn the "self discipline necessary for a healthy lifestyle," according to a letter sent out to parents by Head of Middle School Ronnie Cazeau, Head of Upper School Harry Salamandra and Head of Athletics Audrius Barzdukas.

At Harvard-Westlake, Cazeau and Salamandra strive to "empower" and "enable" their students—or, that's how the mission statement reads. Yes, overall, the school does do an excellent job developing self-reliance in its students. We are trusted to be able to manage our time from seventh grade on during free periods and we are repeatedly told that, every year at Harvard-Westlake, our responsibilities and our academic maturity increase.

We are deemed old enough for free condoms at school, but not old enough to make decisions about our lunches. This new campaign against all that is sweet tosses out the idea of building self-reliance.

Apparently, we are so incapable of making the right dietary choices that all temptation must be removed.

In the real world, temptation is lurking all around. Working under the premise that this policy is to instill "self-discipline for a healthy lifestyle as we become citizens of the world," should we assume the world is without candy and soda, and if so, how are

we supposed to learn self-discipline when there is nothing for us to discipline against?

It is undeniable that upping the healthy options in the cafeteria is a good idea; however, eliminating all other choices implies that we cannot be trusted to make the right decisions. The new restrictions on our food choices are equivalent to putting restrictions on free periods; a student cannot be trusted to do his or her homework, so he or she must forcibly be placed in the library. It would be a rousing success to be sure.

We understand the administration's goal to promote a healthier lifestyle. However, in a school with such a rigorous curriculum, we deserve some candy and soda. Balancing an in-class essay, math quiz and an AP Biology test in one day warrants a Snickers bar and a Diet Coke.

We propose a compromise. If the school wants to help us be healthier, there should be an increase in healthy choices in the cafeterias, alongside the unhealthy choices.

Limiting our lunch choices does not breed a student ready to take on the dietary traps of the world with discipline, but will only result in sugar-starved teenagers.

As the old proverb goes, you can lead a horse to water, but if it really wants soda, you can't make it drink.

1. In this lead, the last two lines give a clever twist to the cliché, "the straw that broke the camel's back" and then proceeds to a straightforward position statement.

2. The writer follows this paragraph with a brief summary of the new ban, to inform the readers who aren't aware of what has changed. The writer's research produces the quotes from the school's mission statement, which bolster the argument that the ban contradicts the school's stated goal of empowering and enabling students in self-reliance.

3. Good editorial writers don't just present their points; they fully develop each one to enhance its power and scope. The writer's point about giving students responsibility to handle condoms but not their own lunches is a striking extension of the "contradiction" point.

4. The next paragraphs further develop the argument by pointing out that eliminating candy and soda at school won't prepare students for the real world – which is still full of tempting and unhealthy diet choices.

5. Another strength of the editorial comes with the board's proposal for a feasible compromise solution – increasing the range of healthy lunch choices without eliminating the current options. The writer follows with a clever play off another cliché to reinforce the main idea of the story.

**FIGURE 7.2** "Step Away from the Skittles" by Anna Etra. Art by Joyce Kim. *The Chronicle*, Harvard-Westlake School, Los Angeles, Calif. Reproduced by permission of Kathleen Neumeyer.

The *Chronicle* staff brings a strong voice to an editorial asking that the school lift its ban on soft drinks and candy machines in the school cafeteria. The editorial writer's strong use of specifics and developed logical points lends credibility to an argument that in some administrators' eyes could be seen as whining. Editorial writers should be keenly aware of issues that impact their readership and speak to those issues.

# opinion

HARVARD-WESTLAKE SCHOOL □ VOLUME XIX □ ISSUE 6 □ MARCH 24, 2010



## Slow down for Julia and just B

**T**wo holes were seared into our school in the past three months. Some of us lost a classmate, some of us a friend, but we have all felt the pain of laying to rest two of our own. One of the holes is the size of a 17-year-old science whiz with the heart of gold, just as he was getting ready to graduate and take on the world. The other, a 13-year-old dancer who by all accounts spread optimism and cheerfulness wherever she went.

Brendan Kutler and Julia Siegler share little in common other than that their deaths were devastating blows to the entire school and all who knew them. We lost both Brendan and Julia in senseless cosmic spasms, the kind that make us question our faith in a rational and benevolent universe.

If there is any ray of good to emerge from these successive tragedies, it is the way in which our community rallied together to support each other. Teachers, students and parents alike were rocked by the news, whether or not they knew Brendan or Julia.

The ubiquitous double baseball caps in honor of Brendan as well as the letters of love and support that practically overflow in Julia's bedroom are a testament to the family that is Harvard-Westlake. Purple bouquets fill the corner of Sunset and Cliffwood, now covered in scrawled messages of love and mourning.

Since their deaths, we have heard more beautiful and eloquent things said about Julia and Brendan than we have ever heard anybody say about anybody. These words bring comfort to us as we grieve their loss, but we think another true tragedy is that they never got to hear what people truly thought of them while they were still alive.

All of the beautiful things people have been saying were not planted posthumously. The compliments were in our minds, but we never thought to or summoned the courage to say them until it was too late for the subjects to hear.

We always talk about the uncertainty of life in an abstract, rhetorical manner that borders on cliché. "You better enjoy life because you never know when you'll step into a street and lose it in a flash," or some

variation is a phrase said so often that there is only the hollow echo of a trite, vague remark until the violent reminder of the fundamental truth that one second you could be running for a bus and the next, not. It is necessary to try to take something away from what would seem to be a senseless tragedy in order to maintain our own beliefs in a logical existence.

The only lesson we can find from the loss of Brendan and Julia, though, is that we shouldn't bottle up and hide away our feelings about others. If you have something nice to say to someone, say it while you still can.

We shouldn't have to wait until a person is gone to remember them fondly.

Too often we take for granted the idea that the people we love know that we love them. When we criticize our friends, it is rooted in our admiration and affection for them, but usually that part escapes day-to-day conversations. There would be much more happiness in the world if we just vocalized those compliments that we think but don't say.

In honor of Julia, her friends have placed street signs and made wristbands that read "Slow Down for Julia." The phrase, they said, has double meaning: drive with more caution so as to avoid another accident like the one that took Julia, but also take your time in everyday life to appreciate the beauty in the world and people around you. We should decrease the tempo of our lives as well as the speed of our cars. We should stop and smell the roses, and then tell the roses how good they smell.

So Slow Down for Julia and Smile for BK. Spread love while you still can, because you never know when, suddenly, you can't.

1. With these paragraphs, the writer's able to walk the fine line of not being offensive toward the friends of the deceased students while still transitioning to the editorial's point that people need to share their inner positive thoughts and compliments with friends while they're still around to enjoy them.

2. The writer's depth of thought shows here as the writer looks beyond the clichés that students toss around meaninglessly.

3. What a wonderful twist here, tying the wording of the sign with the editorial's basic premise.

4. The conclusion, as discussed in the editorial formula above, should reinforce the argument and give a solution, or urge the reader to act when appropriate. The conclusion can have as much voice as the editorial lead, leaving the reader with a strong, lasting impression. In Figure 7.3, the writer builds wonderfully on a standard phrase "stop and smell the roses," – adding "... and tell the roses how good they smell" to echo the point that we should say how much we love others while they're still alive. The concluding sentence has a wonderful rhythm to it, reinforcing how shocking, sudden and final the death of a friend can be.

**FIGURE 7.3** "Slow Down for Julia and Just B." Editorial by Sam Adams. *The Chronicle*, Harvard-Westlake School, Los Angeles, Calif. Reproduced by permission of Kathleen Neumeyer.

This Harvard-Westlake *Chronicle* editorial doesn't fit the stereotype of issue editorial. Following the deaths of two students, the publication worked to help students cope in a difficult time. Editorials can do more than find fault. This one helps readers find lessons and reason to move forward. Editorials can also commend projects and decisions to give positive reinforcement where needed.

**FIGURE 7.4** Editorial cartoon. Gabriela Epstein, *The Spoke*, Conestoga High School, Berwyn, Pa. [http://www.studentpress.org/nspa/winners/image/cartoon11\\_001.jpg](http://www.studentpress.org/nspa/winners/image/cartoon11_001.jpg).

The editorial cartoon can deliver a powerful message in one panel. This cartoon acknowledges the work of several school clubs' efforts to "pull the plug" on cyberbullying at the school. As it is in this one, the art delivering the message needs to be the dominant element in the frame and should not be littered with irrelevant visual details.



- Editorial cartoonists often create the original cartoon at twice the size it will appear in the publication – so that when the image is reduced, lines and cross-hatching will look better.
- Beginning cartoonists sometimes make the punch-line panel too small within the overall cartoon. As a good photographer crops out needless information in the photo and zooms in on the storytelling action, good cartoonists must focus on the central point of the cartoon and make that fill the panel.

## COLUMNS

The **column**, an opinion piece by one person, is as varied as any form of journalistic writing. From column to column, the writer can vary the topic, the writing structure, the writing style and the tone.

Nevertheless, there are some basic standards to which all columns should conform:

- Columns should make a point. The column shouldn't be pointless rambling. The writer should find a focus and stick to it.
- The column should speak to an audience. While column writers may give personal opinions or share personal stories to make a point, the audience must find themselves engaged with the writing. While the column writer may use the personal pronoun "I," the column should never seem like it's all about the author.
- Each column should have a beginning, a middle and an end. The same concepts in earlier discussions of lead, body and conclusion generally apply here. The lead should grab the attention of the reader and be relevant to the focus. The body should follow a logical structure and move the story along to develop the focus. The conclusion

### Quick Exercise

Pick one of the following topics and sketch out a visual analogy for an editorial cartoon:

- 1 recklessness in the school parking lot
- 2 overprotective parents
- 3 elimination of all drink machines in the school.

## IN ACTION

### Column ideas

- A columnist disputed the school's right to punish a girl after she, while off-campus, sent nude photos of herself to other students.
- After not qualifying for the district orchestra, a columnist wrote about how she got through the bitterness and found lessons in her failure.
- A 16-year-old female columnist put on a weighted pregnancy simulation belly, went out in public and wrote about the reactions she faced.
- A sophomore wrote about the chaos and love he experienced growing up in a family of seven children.
- A senior wrote a letter to her freshman self, advising her about her future. The letter served as a call to freshman to be themselves for a drama-free year.
- A writer suggests discussing radical ideas such as suspending Congress for a benevolent dictator, all in an effort to rethink the current American system. The writer contends that the discussion of ideas is one of the few ways to save U.S. democracy that no longer seems to be in pursuit of liberty as it is interested in the pursuit of shopping malls and weekend music festivals.





## Age is just a really scary number

Tomorrow I can buy cigarettes. I will also be able to vote, get married, join the navy, and adopt a child. As of March 12, I'm going to be a legal adult.

So why am I so scared about it? Sometimes I feel like I'm a little Peter Pan. I've never wanted to grow up. While other kids dreamed of being adults so they could eat ice cream for every meal and see PG-13 movies, I valued the structure of my parents' rules. I didn't mind going to bed at 8 every night and only watching *Full House* on TV.

I guess that some would call this acceptance of rules maturity, but I think it has a lot to do with fear.

Because most of my March 11s have been filled with a little bit of trepidation.

The night before I turned 10, I stared at the ceiling, hoping that I wouldn't miss living in single digits. Before I turned 13, I fretted for hours, hoping that come midnight, I wouldn't be possessed with the overwhelming need to loiter outside a Walgreens or graffiti a bridge -- my mom had always blamed these offenses on the teenagers. On the eve of my 16th birthday, I had nightmares about crashing into innocent pedestrians or totaling the car within a couple hours of getting my license.

But this year, my fears have some grounds. I think that it's normal for seniors to feel a little scared about the "I" word: independence. Not Fourth of July independence, but the fact that I'm going to be eating Easy Mac every night for four years instead of sitting down to something that Mom made. Soon, I'll be paying the bills and worrying about mortgages. There'll be no one to depend on but myself.

To be blatantly honest, I'm scared about being out in the real world. I mean, most of us have grown up in this tight little North Dallas bubble.

And I think that the word "adult" is making that imminent reality a little too real for me. I still enjoy reading awkward "tween" novels and watching animated Disney movies. I like jumping off the last step of the stairs and skipping around the house. I find myself humming the "Itsy-bitsy Spider" to myself often.

But tomorrow is coming. I'm going to have to turn 18. I'll be excited. I'll smile, grit my teeth, and blow out that 18th candle.

I'll try to be adult about it.

**FIGURE 7.5** *Eagle Edition*, The Episcopal School of Dallas, Dallas, Texas, Issue 5, Vol. 27, March 11, 2010, p. 26. "Age is just a really scary number," by Kate Skochdopole. Reproduced by permission of Barbara Meier.

Column writers often give readers a different perspective on a daily event. While teenagers normally celebrate their 18th birthday and all the newfound freedoms, this Episcopal School of Dallas writer takes an insightful look at all the responsibilities. She says what other teenagers may think but won't say aloud: getting older is scary.

reinforces the focus and leaves the reader with a strong sense of the column's main points.

- Like editorials, columns can require research. An ill-prepared argument in a column may be even more obvious to readers than in a news story. Readers tend to respond negatively and sometimes harshly to columnists who toss off opinions without factual or logical support.
- Columns should be developed with specifics. The concrete nouns and verbs, the strong voice and the strategic pacing used in feature writing (see Chapter 6) should all be employed in column writing.
- Good column writers may have the opportunity to put into words those feelings and opinions that their readers are afraid to voice in public.
- Strong column writers are often powerful storytellers, bringing a person's experiences – sometimes their own – to life and using them to shed light on an issue that readers may not have considered.
- Columnists can offer fresh perspective to well-worn issues. Graduation, grades and stress can be clichéd high school topics, but a compelling columnist will find a refreshing or poignant way to address these universal, but no less powerful, experiences.

## BLOG WRITING

A **blog** (short for "web log") is online commentary, usually appearing in reverse chronological order, which addresses a specific area of knowledge, and is updated on a regular basis. While column writing is typically a top job on newspaper staffs, the blogger position has been tackled by anyone with a website who wishes to be heard. But only those bloggers good enough to consistently produce interesting, insightful pieces in their areas of interest build a readership. People still differ as to whether blogging is journalism. As Poynter writing coach Roy Peter Clark argues:

Most bloggers are not journalists. Most do not claim to be. Some bloggers who are journalists disdain journalists – they don't want to be associated with the mainstream media. Blogging – like journalism—is a term that contains many different forms of expression. The key ... is whether the blogger finds things out and checks thing out. Without that, there is no journalism.

Source: <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/writing-tools/83326/writing-for-the-web-the-basics-still-apply/>

The blog is a relatively young writing form, still evolving on thousands of websites across the Internet. But when compared to the editorial and column, some basic features about blogs emerge:

- Blogs are updated regularly for the Internet reader who is always searching for the latest information.
- Columns and blogs are similar in their use of voice, structure and development.
- Blogs usually provide abundant links to their sources and related information elsewhere on the web – usually in the text of the blog itself.
- Individual blog posts should be relatively short, to fit on one or two computer screens – but blogs can span months or years of comments, reflections, analysis and research.

# Trick or Tramp

Halloween used to be cute. Homemade ghosts and ghouls would dart around neighborhood streets in a never-ending hunt for the house with the biggest candy bars. But as soon as adolescence hits, many girls decide Halloween is a chance to put on their underwear and classiest pair of stripper heels and declare the skimpy outfit a costume.

Now, I completely understand why ladies might see the appeal of having one night a year when they can dress up. It's fun to prance around in costume. It is, however, completely unnecessary to dress with no self-respect. I always thought Halloween was an opportunity to dress as a dream job, but judging by the costumes I've seen these past few years, our generation will be full of scantily clad doctors, police officers and bumblebees.

Half the time, these flimsy outfits make no sense. Marie Antoinette wore more than a wig and booty shorts. Referees seldom wear nine-inch heels and skirts. If you want to be a pirate, go ahead, be a pirate. Just wear what pirates would wear – long pants and a poofy shirt. Those plunging v-necks and butt-length skirts are demeaning and historically inaccurate.

The worst part is costume stores are encouraging teenagers to clothe themselves in skin-tight shorts and shirts. The online costume store [www.zoogstercostumes.com](http://www.zoogstercostumes.com) has a section specifically dedicated to "Sexy Teen Costumes," containing outfits such as Sexy Oktoberfest Beer Girl, Sexy Snow White, and Go-Go Girl (an outfit that literally is nothing more than a bikini top and a neon yellow ultra-miniskirt).

They even have the audacity to ruin a character very dear to me – Harry Potter. Taking the classy Hogwarts uniform and transforming it into a tiny, gray dress that a Chihuahua wouldn't fit into is horrifying and borderline depressing. Thank goodness they had the decency to remember the glasses and wand. Otherwise, I would probably start a riot.

Everyone likes to look good. I get that. But here's a secret: less is not always more. Girls can look good without dressing like they are at a Playboy Bunny audition. Have fun with Halloween, but have some self-respect.

And whatever you do, don't make Harry Potter look trashy.

[csalzman@thekirkwoodcall.com](mailto:csalzman@thekirkwoodcall.com)

Claire Salzman  
opinions writer

Natalie Webb artist  
Drew Chapman photographer

**FIGURE 7.6** *The Kirkwood Call*, Kirkwood High School, Kirkwood, Mo. Reproduced by permission of Mitch Eden.

Good column writers can put words to gut reactions. In this column from *The Kirkwood Call*, the writer breaks down her dislike for the trend of sexy Halloween costumes into vivid, voice-filled points. We've identified some of the strong writing devices the columnist chose.

1. The strong headline and design promise an equally strong and clever column.
2. Lead is short and gives the reader direct insight into the writer's views.
3. The writer makes a wonderful point about nonsensical Halloween outfits. She brings the point alive with the concrete examples of a referee in nine-inch heels and a pirate without a poofy shirt.
4. Notice that the writer looks for a more concrete and interesting way to say "It's skimpy." Good column writers bring a vivid concrete voice to the everyday.
5. The authors concluding two paragraphs play off the cliché "less is more" and use the repetition of the word "have" for some rhythm to the writing.



**FIGURE 7.7** *ReMarker*, St. Mark's School of Texas, Dallas, Texas. Reproduced by permission of Ray Westbrook.

In this unusual column, the writer looks inward, finding parallels between his own experiences and that of celebrities run amok. He opens with a clever observation about the common strands in recent stories about David Beckham and Charlie Sheen. The columnist discusses the insanity of his own actions and that of the celebrity-obsessed public, which craves lurid stories of celebrity disgrace.



lee  
perkins

## On David Beckham, Charlie Sheen and God

**D**avid Beckham got a new tattoo. Yep, that's international news.

And I don't know what's more disturbing, the fact that his new ink depicts the modest soccer star as Jesus Christ, emerging from the lush undergrowth of heaven accompanied by angelic figures, or that this ground-breaking story has maneuvered its way into every major news outlet.

More ominous were Charlie Sheen's quotes in a Yahoo! news article.

The actor declared that he is "tired of pretending that I'm not special," and de-

scribed himself as having "tiger blood" and "Adonis DNA."

Seriously, when was this transition from celebrity to deity?

But in all truthfulness, the ridiculously egotistical actions of these famous figures — the desperate pleas for attention and publicity — are partially my fault.

I am one of many people with too much free time who sifted through trivial, pseudo-journalistic articles and clicked on the enticing photograph of Beckham's ink-splattered left pectoral.

I read the few sentences about Beck's trip to the tattoo parlor, about how every tattoo he has represents something meaningful in his life, his skin rivaling the Prado and the Bible, and the worst part is, I enjoyed it.

I can't explain why, but I take some

perverse pleasure in reading about these public icons. Steep rises into the public eye, schemes for attention and, of course, crumbling demises — it all interests me.

Maybe I subconsciously seek some time in the spotlight, indulging in this gossip to quench my thirst for fame.

Honestly, I don't know.

Deep down, I think we all desire fame, or at least some attention and recognition. It's an obsession that manifests itself in the media's thorough coverage of celebrities' every move.

It's the reason that Justin Beiber's haircut is a national crisis, and that the talentless Paris Hilton was the seventh most Googled person last year.

Because at the very core, there's a bit of God in all of us.

And a little bit more in Charlie Sheen.

Deep down, I think we all desire fame, or at least some attention and recognition. It's an obsession that manifests itself in the media's thorough coverage of every celebrity move.

## REVIEW WRITING

Lil Wayne's latest music release may be worth the download price. Will Ferrell's next film — an attempt to revive his career — may not be. Teens often dictate what's a hit and what isn't in the world of entertainment and pop culture. As a reviewer, you get a chance to experience a song or a film first and to share your opinion of it with other teens — an influential and rewarding role.

High school publications have long provided **reviews**, evaluations of entertainment, products and services for an increasingly sophisticated and powerful group of consumers.

Two considerations are critical in review writing. First, the writer must ensure that the review is timely. Both Will Ferrell and Lil Wayne may have fallen off the radar by the time this textbook is published. Newspapers that publish once a month or every six weeks face a major challenge in reviewing: how to offer insight into a product or service while it is still relevant to readers. Websites that can post reviews during the opening week of a movie or the day after a music release can provide timely and relevant information for the reader. Print newspapers can research upcoming release dates and plan out reviews to accommodate their publication schedule, but this requires careful planning.

Second, the review writer needs to make sure the review is a genuine opinion piece, not just a summary or free advertising for a service or product. As with all opinion pieces, the writer should offer a sense of his take on the service or product in the lead, and then back it up with specific details, facts and features. The writer may preview a few plot points of a film or provide background information about a new personal electronic device, but the main organization of the piece should be structured to support an opinion. When summarizing any part of a book or film, review writers shouldn't give too much away, to avoid ruining surprises or twists.

### Quick Exercise

Develop a list of three topics you could blog about regularly. Discuss your topics with a partner and settle on one that readers would most connect with.

### Quick Exercise

Do some research to develop a list of seven products that will be released in the next two months that you are excited about and would like to review.

## REVIEWING TIPS

While approaches to reviews can vary as much as the products, services and entertainment options that teenagers consume, the following advice can be applied to most reviews:

- Reviewers should choose to evaluate something they find enjoyable. They will then anticipate interests and concerns of readers who might benefit or have curiosity about the product.

## “ WORDS of WISDOM

1. What is the artist (writer, filmmaker, playwright, etc.) trying to do?
2. How well did he/she do it?
3. Was it worth doing?

*You could say that in writing Macbeth William Shakespeare was attempting to examine issues of ambition and guilt while providing his audience with some gruesome thrills and violence.*

*Did he do it? Yeah, 400 years of Macbeth productions suggest his mission was accomplished.*

*Was it worth doing? Yes. These are issues that all people in all times and places must deal with ... that's what makes Macbeth immortal.*

*On the other hand, let's say you've just seen Zookeeper with Kevin James. It's the movie with the talking animals.*

*What were the filmmakers trying to do? Well, they're trying to make audiences laugh, certainly. AND they're trying to make a load of money.*

*How well did they succeed? That can be measured in how many times you laughed and whether the movie was profitable.*

*Was it worth doing? Well, that's the dealbreaker. Most of today's entertainments aren't really ABOUT anything. They have no real reason for being except to keep people working and audiences buying tickets (or tuning in). Under those circumstances you may conclude that, no, this film, poem, book, etc. wasn't worth doing.*

*Robert Butler, Butler's Cinema Scene, <http://butlerscinemascene.com>, Kansas City, Mo.*



- Student reviewers should consider the audience at which the product or service is targeted. It's not fair to evaluate Zoe's Fun Burger's low appeal for a gourmet, post-opera crowd, when the café actually caters to the seven-year-olds who have been playing Zombie Tag next door.
- The reviewer should do some research prior to testing a product, eating a meal or viewing a film. Researching an author or chef or director's previous work may provide a basis to evaluate the current offerings.

**FIGURE 7.8** Food review by Amy Char and Adriana Millar, thelowell.org, Lowell High School, San Francisco, Calif. Reproduced by permission of Sharn Matusek.

The *Lowell's* review of a ready-to-cook meal service offers a clear opinion with a lively voice and detailed development. The writers clearly understand their audience as they discuss the value of the service in lieu of eating Nutella at 10:30 at night. They continue that viewpoint with strong specifics, noting the simple instructions for when the pan is hot: "when you see 'wisps of smoke coming off the pan.'" They also provide a vivid sensory description of the food's taste and appearance: "Mixing together the sauce, chicken and rice in my bowl turned it into a hearty stew."

The screenshot shows the homepage of TheLowell.org. The main article is a food review titled "REVIEW: Cook! SF makes gourmet chefs out of tired teenagers" by Amy Char and Adriana Millar, dated Mar. 22, 2011. The review discusses a ready-to-cook meal service called Cook! SF. It includes a photo of a meal and a video player for "Sports Video: Battle of the Birds". The website has a navigation bar with links to Front Page, News, Sports, Features, Opinion, Columns, PDF Archive, Podcasts, and Videos. There are also social media links for Facebook, Twitter, and RSS.

- Just as a good reporter would, a reviewer should take copious notes. Notes might include the key lyrics from the best song on a CD or descriptions of the cardboard characters that the movie's director ignored in favor of visual effects.
- The writer should vary the review's structure. The reviewer's account doesn't have to start chronologically, as he walks through the restaurant door. The three-layer carrot cake served warm for dessert that made the whole visit worthwhile may belong in the lead.
- Reviewers should hit the highlights. They don't have to cover every song or every dish.
- Writers shouldn't give too much away. This is particularly true in movie reviews. Don't give away the surprises that would ruin the movie for the readers.
- Good entertainment writers should have detailed knowledge of their review specialty but still keep a general audience in mind. While a detailed understanding of the development of the *Star Wars* movies will serve the writer well in a review, showing off this arcane knowledge in a review of a new sci-fi TV show will only bore or annoy the reader.
- A review should be fair, honest and reasonable. A writer should never review something she didn't experience and shouldn't go into any review determined to bash someone or something – even if the review is negative on many points.
- The review writer should outline all the important factors related to the product or service. Everything from costs to availability to ambience could be relevant considerations for a review writer.
- Websites can allow high school publications to create links to subjects that are mentioned in the review. Movie reviews might include a link to the movie trailers or a biography of the director. Song reviews might have links to the artist's iTunes page or free downloads from the artist's website.
- Entertainment coverage can be developed through news features and reviews can be presented in alternative formats, such as YouTube videos.

HELPFUL  
TIPS**Review topics**

What writers choose to review can be as varied as those things teenagers value in their everyday lives. These might include the following, but the options are almost limitless.

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| → Movies                     | → Technology products                     |
| → Music                      | → Coffee, ice cream or yogurt shops       |
| → Plays                      | → Books                                   |
| → Musicals                   | → TV shows                                |
| → Restaurants                | → Food trends                             |
| → Beverages or food products | → Clothes and clothing stores             |
| → Websites                   | → Sporting goods or sporting goods stores |
| → Phone apps                 | → Art shows and museum exhibits           |

## “ WORDS of WISDOM

### Five tips for reviewers

1. Remember that your objective is to analyze the job of the performance/product in terms of what its creators were wanting to accomplish, not what you think it should be. *[Don't judge a high school musical by Glee standards, or a poetry slam to literary festival levels.]*
2. Only review performances/products that you are an expert consumer of and have a deep appreciation for. *[If you don't like heavy metal, don't review a performance by Motley Crüe.]*
3. Offer constructive criticism, not sarcastic comments. The goal of any good reviewer is to improve the performance/product being offered, not just to write something clever and snarky.
4. Evaluate the product/performance. Don't make this a personality piece. Keep your comments focused on what's being offered to the public.
5. Be a sensor by proxy for your readers so they know what to expect should they seek the same product/performance. This is a reader service.

Sandy Hall-Chiles, Yavneh Academy, Dallas, Texas





**FIGURE 7.9** *ReMarker*, St. Mark's School of Texas, Dallas, Texas. Reproduced by permission of Ray Westbrook.

*ReMarker* staff added some creativity to their editorial page with the creation of "the heat index," a recurring short opinion package. The package approach to brief editorials gives the publication an opportunity to applaud or jeer people, events or issues that don't need a full-length piece. Lunch food and a creative new class were perfect topics that needed succinct development and could be designed in a clean tight graphic.

remarker | SEPTEMBER 23, 2011

## commentary

### The 24-hour solo A tradition that must be kept

Any Marksman will tell you what the Pecos Wilderness Trip is about: the 24-hour solo – a day of isolation in the serene New Mexican forest – an opportunity for incoming freshmen to reflect on their past decisions and ponder what paths they will take during their high school career. This past summer, the solo was reduced to 12 hours. Administrators cited safety as the primary reason for their decision.



A group of upcoming freshmen hiking through the Pecos

Headmaster Arnie Holtberg will meet next month with wilderness directors Scott Hunt and Nick Sberna to determine whether they will extend their decision for future Pecos trips.

If the mission of the Pecos trip is to foster growth and independence in Marksmen, then we believe this goal cannot be achieved without a 24-hour solo. If the administration hopes to make the Pecos Trip safer with their 12-hour reduction, then we believe they are targeting the wrong aspect of the trip.

Of all the activities on the Pecos Trip, the solo is arguably the safest. There have been plenty of injuries on the Pecos Trip during its 40-year tenure – but over all these years, no Marksman has been injured during his 24-hour solo. After all, one takes more of statistical risk by riding the Pecos-bound bus than he does by spending a day in quiet reflection a few hundred meters from his camp leader.

If administrators were to provide a legitimate safety concern, we would certainly accept that – the trip is not intended to be dangerous. If they choose to extend their 12-hour solo decision for years to come, however, they are cheating future generations of Marksmen of a full experience here. The independence and refined sense of self that the student gains from the 24-hour solo cannot be taught in a classroom and is undermined in just 12 hours.

The truth is the solo is demanding. Being a Marksman is demanding. But this demand on Marksmen defines the school. Marksmen should be allowed to experience the 24-hour solo just like their friends, brothers and fathers before them.

We urge administrators, when they meet next month, to restore the tradition of the 24-hour solo.

### Scott Gonzalez Thanks for stepping up – again

When Marksmen and faculty flocked into Hicks Gymnasium for the annual opening convocation Aug. 23, they expected Rev. Richard Towers, as in years past, to deliver the opening prayer.



Scott Gonzalez

Instead, Dean of Campus Scott Gonzalez stood up to speak to the school. The word soon spread that Gonzalez would take the role of interim chaplain – a job very familiar to him.

In the past, when the school has been unable to find a replacement for a significant position, Gonzalez has been there to fill those shoes. Not only did he replace Chris Gunnin as interim

head of Upper School after the 2008-2009 school year, but he was also interim head from 2000-2001 and interim chaplain from 2002-2003.

Gonzalez is an example of a true Marksman, whose dedication to the school is boundless. We encourage students to develop interests in activities of various different fields and excel in varied activities like he does.

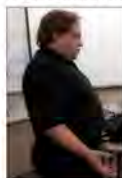
Gonzalez, with his uncanny versatility as a faculty member, portrays an ideal role model to our students. While a devoted dean of campus and an experienced English instructor, Gonzalez is able to step up into key positions and perform these roles with poise and perfection.

We applaud Gonzalez for this ability and for his dedication to this school.

## THE heat index

What's hot – and what's not – around 10600 Preston Road

### Owens's Science Fiction Class | Super Hot



This is hot. Like 373 Kelvin hot. There is no better sight than to see chemistry instructor Ken Owens trotting through the second floor of Classroom with his lab coat on and – what? – science fiction books in his hand.

Owens's class, exploring the intriguing similarities between the worlds of science and literature, is one of the most popular English electives among seniors. Entering his class is like entering the *Chronicles of Mars*, and opening into a world of imagination.

### Lunch Planning | Pretty Chilly

The cafeteria often features all its best items in one lunch, resulting in one day of unbridled stomach ecstasy, often followed by vicious cramps for those audacious enough to tackle chicken tikka masala, a Hotberger, red velvet froyo, chocolate milk, yogurt parfait and peach crisp in one sitting.

Unfortunately, the physics of a Marksman's stomach is different from those of a black hole. Perhaps the cafeteria can spread the wealth, and allow us to accept all of our entrees as brethren instead of pitching them into a contest for our affection.

### Brown's Chapel Solo | Hot

Let's be honest. When Master Teacher David Brown stood up and sang "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" during chapel Sept. 14, no one could hold a candle off his face.

Now that Brown has broken the musical ice, maybe the Chapel Committee will finally accept our requests for psalm rap-battles. And if we're really lucky, they'll let us add DJ Spence's dubstep remix of "All Things Bright and Beautiful" to our hymn books.



### Vuvuzelas | Lukewarm

Vuvuzelas are slippery slopes. During a vuvuzela jazz session, if you can somehow maintain consciousness despite ruptured ear drums and a lack of oxygen, you won't be able to stop unless you are

either sprayed with bear mace or your instrument is clogged with the backup vuvuzela hanging from your lanyard. The vuvuzela's tone also perfectly matches a wide repertoire of exotic animals' mating calls, so play with caution.

## THE midterm exam

The recent chaos in Libya, including riots, a civil war and an innumerable amount of deaths, has caused much instability in the nation.

With the events in Libya becoming one of the most talked-about topics in the news, we feel that it is important for each Marksman to have a sufficient amount of knowledge this country.

Here are six questions to test and further extend your knowledge of Libya. Don't worry, we won't give you a grade on this. We just want to make sure you're up to date.



Riots in Libya

### THE QUESTIONS

- Which of the following is the capital of Libya?
  - Tripoli
  - Doha
  - Khartoum
  - Libya City
- What is the official language of Libya?
  - Libyan
  - Arabic
  - French
  - Gaddafiian
- Which of the following countries doesn't share a border with Libya?
  - Chad
  - Niger
  - Egypt
  - Nigeria
- In what year did Muammar Gaddafi gain rule in Libya?
  - 1976
  - 1969
  - 1993
  - 2000
- Which of the following titles did Gaddafi give to himself?
  - General
  - Captain
  - Colonel
  - President
- Gaddafi was found to possess an album full of photos of which female U.S. political figure?
  - Hillary Clinton
  - Nancy Pelosi
  - Condoleezza Rice
  - Barbara Bush

### THE ANSWERS

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
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Midterm exam compiled by NAEEM MUSCATWALLA.



## PACKAGED OPINION COVERAGE

Opinion coverage can also be expanded through a variety of short packaged sidebars. Not every opinion needs to be a long developed story. Editorial, op-ed and review pages can include a variety of quick collections of opinion that are creatively designed to pull the reader into the page. Editorial and op-ed pages often feature letters to the editor and short quick editorials packaged under the label thumbs up/thumbs down, letter grades, hot/cold, ratings, etc. Review pages have similar packages that can offer short staff picks or even encourage reader involvement through their feedback about the latest entertainment. The entertainment page tends to offer a more creative approach to the package. The sidebars might include:

- Top three tech gadgets that will make high school easier
- Books you wish the school would assign for a English class
- Readers weigh in on the four best songs for a school dance
- Playoff bracket of the best staycation ideas for spring break.

Opinion writers should be reminded that they still need to include opinion and reasoning even in such short packaged pieces.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of opinion writing is to inform and persuade. To develop a convincing opinion piece, the writer needs thorough knowledge of a subject, gained from research or personal experience. Opinion pieces generally appear as either columns, where the view expressed is that of only one person, or editorials, where the opinion reflects the consensus of a group of people representing the publication.

The editorial generally follows a formula. The formula starts with a lead that explains the issue, delivers a clear position statement and previews the reasoning behind it. The body of the story includes an argument backed up by factual and logical development. The writer should refute the opposing side and present a feasible solution. The editorial conclusion should reinforce the argument.

The column is as varied a form as any style of journalistic writing. The column should make a point and speak to the audience with a fresh perspective, developed with insightful points and original research or vivid storytelling from personal experiences. Blogs are similar in structure and variety to columns but are created through short, pithy, web-linked Internet posts.

The review is another major form of opinion writing. The review is a service to the reader, offering evaluations of entertainment, products and services. Reviews should not be summaries or advertisements, but informed opinions supported by specifics.

### Test your knowledge

Should a review be a complete rehash of a movie or book?

## SUMMARY

- Opinion writers should base their stories on a thorough knowledge of the subject.
- The column is the opinion of one person; the editorial is the opinion of a group.
- Opinion stories, which reflect subjective personal values of an individual, need to be backed up with verifiable statements of fact.
- The editorial is often written along a formula. The writer should start with an opinion, followed by background on the issue and a clear position statement. The writer should defend the argument with specifics in the body of the story as well as refuting the opposing side and providing a feasible solution. The story should end with a strong summary of the argument or a call to act on the issue.
- Columns should have a point and speak to readers with a fresh perspective on an issue or experience.
- Reviews should offer the reader timely insight and opinion on a relevant product, service or entertainment option. Reviewers should have a detailed knowledge of the subject but keep the target audience in mind. Reviews should be fair, honest and reasonable.
- Packaged opinion coverage can offer the reader brief but developed opinion in an attractive, reader-friendly form.

## KEY TERMS

blog

call to action

column

editorial

editorial board

editorial cartoon

editorial lead

op-ed page

review writing

## EXERCISES

- 1 Pick an opinion piece and underline 10 opinion words or phrases. Rank the top three strongest opinion words or phrases and develop an argument for your ranking.
- 2 Editorial page scavenger hunt. From editorial pages or websites, clip and mount examples of these:
  - (a) letter to the editor
  - (b) an editorial cartoon that deals with a topic of student interest
  - (c) solution proposed in an editorial
  - (d) three facts used to back up opinion
  - (e) how design is used to differentiate opinion stories from news stories
  - (f) examples of opposing opinions on the same topic
  - (g) paragraph from an editorial that refutes the opposing sides.

3 Write an editorial based on the information given in Chapter 3, Exercise 4.

4 Write a column on one of the following topics:

- (a) a rewarding or frustrating experience with a parent
- (b) a state issue that impacts students
- (c) something that others do that makes a positive impact on people
- (d) a school rule that you have a better solution for.

5 Read the following column and answer these questions:

- (a) Why was the opening paragraph about her D.A.R.E. essay important to the point of the column?
- (b) Underline three good uses of specifics or dialogue and explain what point the writer was making with them.
- (c) Do you think it took courage to write and publish this story? Why, or why not?

08

**OPINION**  
 09-20-10

## TIME WASTED

▶Kat Buchanan

Junior reflects on her past experiences with underage drinking

In sixth grade, I won an award from D.A.R.E. for an essay I wrote.

It was a masterpiece, filled with all of my naïve heart and soul, opening with the hard-hitting line: "My name may be Kat, but that doesn't mean I have nine lives, and I'm not going to waste the one I do have using drugs and alcohol."

I read it in front of the entire Westwood View student, parent and administrative body and I was filled with hope for my future, one that was bound to be illegal substance-free. I promised myself I'd practice what I preached. It seemed easy enough then, standing boldly at the podium with Officer Sullivan at my side.

After sixth grade, I found myself standing on the threshold of middle school and the nearby Pembroke Hill School proved to be the perfect opportunity for a new experience. So I went for it. I applied for the '07-'08 academic year and was accepted.

As the preteen with the red D.A.R.E. T-shirt on, I had no idea that the coming years would bring me closer and closer to rock bottom. No warning signs telling me to stay where I was. To sidestep disaster.

I had to find out for myself.

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"I don't know how she got like this, Carol, I really do not." I repeatedly bang my head against my best friend's kitchen door, sobbing, screaming, profanity and gibberish spewing forth, wondering what I've done now and how I can escape this lifestyle, how I can right my most recent wrong.

My mind feels like a PowerPoint presentation with too many pictures and scarce bullet points explaining what's going on. Like I'm having one of those dreams where I show up at school without my backpack, sitting in classes I didn't sign up for, trying to read words in a language I don't understand.

Or, more realistically, like I'm blow-a-24-into-the-breathalyzer drunk.

My friend's mother's worried face enters my fuzzy line of vision and I feel my own mom's hand grip my shoulder, a hopeless attempt to calm her out-of-control daughter.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

"Kat, we need to get you home. Can you hear me?"

My arms, my legs, my fingers, my toes—nothing is connected; nothing is attached to my body. A tingling sensation fills me up in the worst way possible. There are cuts on my forehead that I won't notice until morning and my ankles are giving out from stumbling in high-heeled boots. But for the time being, I really can't hear her.

Images from mere hours before flash through my mind. A production of horror, the *Kat Messed Up Again Picture Show*.

A bottle of Smirnoff Citron vodka with tap water to chase it down, an unfinished basement floor littered with yellow and black trash bags, an unexpected visit from the host's father. The distorted, angry look on his face as kids cleared out faster than he could recognize them.

I recall my head hitting an off-white cement driveway and Amy frantically searching through the contacts on my phone, looking for someone, anyone, to get us out of the mess I'd gotten us into.

But of course, we were already in it too deep.

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I was right.

Transferring to Pembroke did bring on an array of changes. These new experiences ranged from cliques of mean girls to pre-shredded Abercrombie jeans and Ralph Lauren polos.



As I got older and approached the end of eighth grade, the changes in my lifestyle became more prevalent. Things took a turn for the worse with the red solo cup of Kettle One vodka mixed with Sunkist that lead to the two-year detour from the path I had envisioned myself being on.

It was the first time I drank myself to oblivion. I was 14.

I cannot blame my faulty behavior on hanging out with the "wrong crowd" or giving into peer pressure. I can't blame it on a pushy boyfriend or problems at home or even a desire to experiment.

I can only blame myself. I blame myself wholeheartedly for seeking some way to get around social niceties and skip to drunken heart-to-hearts with strangers. For losing my best friend and my once-strong relationship with my parents; for leaving my morals behind to discover just how much I could act out.

For trying to be someone who I clearly should not be.

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I'm on a hospital bed.

I force my eyes open and immediately cringe at the fluorescent lights shining directly above me. My right hand feels heavy, my eyelids droopy, my mouth dry. I try to follow the maquette of news headlines scrolling underneath the CNN reporter but the words move faster than I can read them. The volume seems to be so loud that it's thumping directly against my eardrums. Many decibels lower, I can hear my parents' urgent whispers fluttering around the hallway in front of me.

It feels like a freight train plowed over me and then backed up for good measure.

I look down at my hand and see an IV hooked up to the vein crawling up my pinky finger. My stomach churns, and I'm just lucid enough to note that I have a phobia of needles before my mind goes blank and my vision black.

The next morning, I awake in my bed at home in a cold sweat. More than ever before, I savor that familiar moment of incoherence, that split-second between dream and wake where nothing matters and I've done nothing wrong.

Then the memories flood into my already-pounding brain and I pull the covers over my head, hoping with all my heart that this storm passes as quickly as it came.

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After that night my freshman year, I was almost done with it.

I began drinking somewhat sparingly, but when I did, it was big—my friends came to know me as a binge drinker. Using the preface of a special occasion, I'd load up on drinks, a

beer here, a couple of shots there. And then more. I had quickly become the girl that people warned their friends to keep an eye on, the burden, the one who always took it too far.

My not-so-subtle relationship with drinking continued up until the second semester of my sophomore year. A new friend entered my life at precisely the right time and he showed me that above all else, staying true to myself and to what I believe in would be the most important factor in the grand scheme of things.

He showed me that relationships with people can be stronger than any proof label on a bottle and that leaning on someone when I need help is much more effective than grabbing a handle and guzzling it down. That true friendship is of infinitely more value than any fake ID.

He showed me the life I thought I'd lost for good, and I haven't had a drink since.

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More often than not, I find myself lying awake at night wishing that I could erase the past.

Drinking and going to parties and talking about drinking and going to parties—it was a cycle that dominated two years of my life, two years wasted. I didn't think I had time for old friends or time to make new ones.

I feel so ashamed of things I've done under the influence, of the people I've hurt and the people I ignored because of the way I was living and the behavior that went along with it. I regret every conversation I missed out on, every family dinner I skipped, every "friend" I never called back.

But in spite of this, I'm glad that it happened to me.

I'm glad that I've realized from experience that life has more to offer than a 12-pack of beer, a trip to the liquor store to see if I'll get carded or a busted party. Money and time can be better spent, especially while I'm still in high school.

I've been to the other side, and I know first-hand that I never want to go back. Artificial fun isn't nearly as great as the real thing.

Since I've come to terms with underage drinking and the consequences that go along with it, I've found myself with more time to spend on the things I enjoy, things that require thought and hard work and laborious nights in room 521 of Shawnee Mission East. I've met many incredible people and learned how to get along with them without throwing back a Bud Light beforehand.

I only have one life, after all. And I'm slowly but surely learning how to live it.

**FIGURE 7.10** Kat Buchanan, *The Harbinger*, Shawnee Mission East High School, Prairie Village, Kansas. Reproduced by permission of C. Dow Tate.

This columnist tackled the issue of binge drinking in high school through her own raw and honest experiences. Column writers often try to make readers think differently about a subject by dealing with real and personal specifics. Statistics can be useful in defending an argument, but some readers respond better to strong narrative.

- 6** Pick a topic from the following list and write a review. Make sure to do background research on the genre and artist:
- (a) a free download of the day's/week's song
  - (b) a new app or website
  - (c) a retro movie that your parents may own but your generation hasn't seen
  - (d) a new line of clothes.
- 7** Develop three ideas for blogs that you could write, outlining three different stories you could do for each. Pick and write your favorite.
- 8** Choose three recent trends in clothing, entertainment or technology and create a packaged opinion piece (a quote collection, rating scale, etc.) from collected opinion from classmates.





