

## **Tips on Writing Op-Ed Pieces and Letters to the Editor**

Unlike providing an interview to a reporter, Op-eds and letters to the editor are stand-alone pieces that focus on your point of view. The purpose of these writings is to persuade readers to agree with your viewpoint. An Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor combines the timeliness of a news story with a personal voice, and is often published by the newspaper to balance the views of other editorials and columns. You should support your position with specific details, however, it is important to remember that this is not a research article. It should be readable and engaging. Keep the following in mind when writing either of these pieces:

- Make your point early on and make sure it is clear. The first sentence should reveal exactly what you intend to write about.
- Don't just attack other groups; make your own point about an issue.
- Demonstrate your personal connection to the issue. People will be convinced of your dedication if you show them where you are coming from.
- Do not use profane language or make a claim that you cannot prove.
- Be timely—capitalize on recent news and events.
- Keep the letter short, simple and focused—stick to a single subject.
- Check the paper's guidelines for word limits for Op-eds and Letters to the Editor.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms and verbosity – use simple sentence structure.

### **Pre-Writing Exercise**

Pretend that you are writing in your personal journal about the topic. For the moment, forget about punctuation, grammar and other concerns and just “write from the heart” for fifteen minutes without stopping. If you run out of things to say, repeat a phrase or word until something else comes to you or your time is done. Once the fifteen minutes have passed, walk away from what you have written for at least five minutes -- check your email or something -- then come back and read it. What was your main point? What was the emotion behind that point? What was it about what you wrote that would make others care about the topic? The answers to those three questions should guide the writing of the Op-ed or the Letter to the Editor that you are about to write.

## Template

### **Opening Paragraph: This is an important issue**

What's going to happen to me now? Honestly, that was my first thought when I heard that Fresno school district stands to lose nearly 80 million dollars. These cuts don't just mean that some classes and teachers will be eliminated, but the elimination of the dreams I have for my future as well.

### **Second and Third Paragraph: This is why it is important to me and should be to you**

I've been dreaming about becoming a computer programmer from the first day that our school opened a computer science lab. But now I have to face the reality that the \$633 per student cut at Lincoln High, will amount to me saying "good-bye computer lab." It also means saying goodbye to my Computer Science teacher, Ms. Taylor, who got new Macs donated for us to use at home. I cringe to think about how it probably means the return of boring study halls with twenty-year old science books and part-time staffers.

### **Next Paragraph: This is what we are going to do about it**

I can't let them just take my future away like that. That is why on May 15<sup>th</sup> I am joining thousands of other students from across the state in telling Governor Schwarzenegger and other politicians that these budget cuts are unfair and just plain wrong

### **Conclusion: Reinforce the importance of the issue and what it means to you and your community.**

Look, I know that these politicians have some hard decisions to make. But does it really make sense to take away the one thing this state really needs to ensure that it will have good future: the education of students like me?

**300-500-word count**