

Major Assignment: Writing an Op-ed Essay

Purpose: To analyze one or more model op-eds; to argue effectively for a point or claim in the context of an op-ed, while providing evidence and considering the needs of your readers; to reflect on the similarities and differences between op-eds and academic papers in terms of argument, structure, and style.

Part 1: Activate background knowledge and analyze the genre

1. **Reflect** on the following questions, after having read a couple op-eds in class this semester.
 - In your own words, what's an op-ed?
 - What was your previous exposure to this genre?
 - What other genres beyond an academic essay is it similar to, and in what ways?
 - What other genres beyond an academic essay is it different from, and in what ways?
 - What is potentially interesting about writing an op-ed?
 - What is potentially challenging about writing one?
2. **Find** an op-ed that relates to our class topic that is current (within the last six months), from any source, and not assigned in class. Read the op-ed, note its title, author, source, and URL, and describe it by addressing the following questions.
 - Who is the author, beyond their name? How is the author's identity relevant to their topic and/or argument?
 - What periodical published this op-ed? What might that suggest about the intended audience?
 - What specific sub-topic does the op-ed address, and what is the author's argument about this topic?
 - How does the author begin (what strategies)?
 - How does the author use evidence (what strategies)?
 - How does the author end (what strategies)?
 - How would you characterize the author's tone, diction, and/or style? What connections are there between these elements and the author's argument and/or audience?
3. **Share** the op-ed you found with the entire class or a small group, and discuss your group's op-eds together after having read or skimmed each: What struck you about these op-eds, taken together as a group? What do you notice about them as a genre?
4. **Discuss** the background material on op-eds that you read in preparation for this assignment: What were some useful tips for writing op-eds that you and your groupmates encountered?
5. **Think about** how you feel as you prepare to write an op-ed of your own: What is exciting about the process? What seems challenging about it? What ideas do you have for how to get started?

Part 2: Write and revise

1. **Write** a 700-1000-word (hard limits on both ends) essay appropriate for the op-ed or “guest essay” genre.
2. **Address** a specific aspect of our topic that is both important and timely (you might need to argue for one or both of those qualities, as they may not be obvious to your readers).
3. **Make** a specific, unique, well-supported, and logical argument about your topic, quoting from, summarizing, and/or referring to at least one of the authors we have read and discussed this semester, in addition to any other examples, evidence, or personal experiences you wish to include. *Hint: Keep track of all the sources and websites you are looking at as you think more about your topic. Some of these you might want to link to from the text of your op-ed.*
4. **Use** key features of the op-ed genre that we have discussed in class, including a strong opening, short and punchy paragraphing, an acknowledgment of alternative points of view, and a “should” statement near the end of your essay.
5. **Consider** your intended audience when making rhetorical decisions, such as about how much background information to include or what tone and what kind of diction to use.
6. **Share** your paper in storyboard and/or [draft form with your classmates](#), discussing each other’s work in light of what you know about the op-ed genre and how effectively each essay communicates its point to its audience.
7. **Revise** your essay, working on your [headline and author “blurb”](#) and your acknowledgment of sources ([fact-checking memo](#)) as you go.

Part 3: Reflect and transfer skills

1. **Look back** at the process of writing your op-ed. Before you started writing it, what did you think would be hardest or most challenging about it, and why? How did your final experience match up to your expectations? What unanticipated challenges did you run into while writing/revising your op-eds, and how did you handle these?
2. **Think about** what the most satisfying thing about writing your op-ed was, and why. What worked well in the final version of your essay, and how did you get to this point?
3. **Reflect** on what it was like to write something other than an academic paper for this assignment. Would you like to write more op-eds, or other alternate genres (i.e., things other than standard academic papers)? Why or why not? What, in your opinion, are the two most important differences between op-eds and academic essays, and how did those differences affect your process of writing the op-ed?
4. **Consider** that you will need to transition back to writing more academic papers in other classes: What two or more things did you work on in the process of writing your op-ed that can help you write stronger academic papers, and why? What strategy or tip that you used on the op-ed assignment is something that also works (or could work) for an academic paper?
5. **Write up** your responses to these questions, and either turn them in with the final version of your op-ed or discuss them in small groups, as your instructor directs.