

Scientific Blogs Writing Guidelines

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Rationale

Communication is one of the key outcomes of an educated person. And in environmental issues, communication is critical to developing ways to engage and address a range of environmental issue. Using digital media has become an increasingly popular way to express our ideas and even used to communicate science – and for many an easy way to criticize science outside the peer review process.

Blogs... can be used in

Learning Objectives

This assignment is based on the EA learning outcome for writing and communicating:

- Understand the real-world processes and implications of environmental problem-solving and decision making.
- Speak and write clearly and persuasively.

What is a Blog? and how can it be used effectively to communicate science?

Characteristics of a Blog

1. Introduction, body and conclusion like other news stories
2. An objective explanation of the issue, especially complex issues
3. A timely news angle
4. Opinions from the opposing viewpoint that refute directly the same issues the writer addresses
5. The opinions of the writer delivered in a professional manner.
Good editorials engage issues, not personalities and refrain from name-calling or other petty tactics of persuasion.
6. Alternative solutions to the problem or issue being criticized.
Anyone can gripe about a problem, but a good editorial should take a pro-active approach to making the situation better by using constructive criticism and giving solutions.

7. A solid and concise conclusion that powerfully summarizes the writer's opinion. Give it some punch.

Types of Blogs

Explain or interpret:

Criticize:

Persuade:

Praise:

Writing a Blog

Give a concise, but thorough, background on the issue. Remember, the majority of people reading the story may not have an understanding of the issue. Give a thoughtful, yet brief, background on the issue before venturing into more details of the campaign.

Strengthen your message by citing national or international trends that show support for your thesis. Some factors that influence public opinion on environmental issues include: a strong economy, the bipartisan support for the issue, the strength and diversity of the constituency, and the broad range of social benefits that might be gained.

Localize the story. Although environmental issues might be very broad and touches many lives across the USA or world, the readers for your opinion editorial will want to know how your thesis affects their community. Provide the audience with specific, well-known examples of how the successful implementation of your thesis can benefit the community in the future.

Although most newspapers keep an open mind in determining the content of their opinion editorials, some newspapers will be more inclined to publish an opinion piece on a subset of topics. Thus, it is important to research the newspaper in advance to appreciate the type of editorials it publishes, as well as what issues are covered in publication as a whole. Remember that a newspaper will not publish a story unless the editorial board feels it represents a unique or different perspective.

Choose your topic wisely

For maximum impact, choose an issue that has been making the headlines recently. For instance, if the Presidential elections are around the corner, focus on a particular topic with political implications. Additionally, be very specific about the issue you wish to

focus on. You might have a lot to say about a dozen issues, but save your knowledge for later. Narrow down your area of interest with as much precision as is possible. This is a great opportunity to practice writing less and saying more!

Declare your agenda outright

An editorial without an unequivocal opinion is bound to fall flat on its face. Right at the very beginning, define your agenda in clear terms. Make sure that you state your opinion or thesis coherently. Remember those research papers and thesis statements you wrote in college. It's time to refresh your memory and concentrate on thesis statement writing skills. This course on how to write a thesis should help you immensely. The essential structure of a thesis statement in an editorial remains the same, only the language is more informal and journalistic.

Build your argument

A good editorial expresses your point of view while a great one manages to persuade others to join your camp. To persuade people, you need a sound argument based on facts and analogies, not vitriol and diatribe. Once you have stated your thesis, acknowledge contradictory opinions and explain why you disagree with them. Use facts, statistics, quotations and theoretical explanations for criticizing your opponents' views and cite your sources. Rejecting them outright without any explanation screams of cowardice and unprofessional ethics. Using external sources without citing them leaves you vulnerable to accusations that you made up the data or using the data inappropriately.

To build a foolproof argument, you will need to achieve a balance between content and style. Not only will you need substantial data, you will also need to structure it coherently. Take this course to learn the basics of writing with writing with precision and clarity.

Strengthen your argument with analogies

Provide possible solutions

Structuring your Op-Ed

Lead with an Objective Explanation of the Issue/Controversy

1. Include the five W's (Who, what, where, when, and why) and the H (How).

Grading

You will be grading for the following criteria with a goal of meeting the first standard for each:

Communication

Define a compelling and timely problem in your own words.

Standards

1. Identifies the problem that demonstrates the topic is both compelling and timely with numerous supporting details and examples which are organized logically and coherently.
2. Identifies the problem with some supporting details and examples in an organized manner.
3. Identifies the problem with few details or examples in a somewhat organized manner.
4. Identifies the problem poorly with few or no details or states the main idea or problem verbatim from other sources.
5. Does not identify problem.

Analysis

Present the opposition's argument with integrity and develop reasonable objections.

1. Uses specific inductive or deductive reasoning to make inferences regarding premises; addresses implications and consequences; identifies facts and relevant information correctly.
2. Uses logical reasoning to make inferences regarding solutions; addresses implications and consequences; Identifies facts and relevant information correctly.
3. Uses superficial reasoning to make inferences regarding solutions; Shows some confusion regarding facts, opinions, and relevant, evidence, data, or information.
4. Makes unexplained, unsupported, or unreasonable inferences regarding solutions; makes multiple errors in distinguishing fact from fiction or in selecting relevant evidence.
5. Does not analyze multiple solutions.

Problem Solving

Select and defend your chosen solution.

1. Thoroughly identifies and addresses key aspects of the problem and insightfully uses facts and relevant evidence from analysis to support and defend potentially valid solutions.

2. Identifies and addresses key aspects of the problem and uses facts and relevant evidence from analysis to develop potentially valid conclusions or solutions. Identifies and addresses some aspects of the problem; develops possible conclusions or solutions using some inappropriate opinions and irrelevant information from analysis.
3. Identifies and addresses only one aspect of the problem but develops untestable hypothesis; or develops invalid conclusions or solutions based on opinion or irrelevant information.
4. Does not select and defend a solution.

Evaluation

Identify weaknesses in your chosen solution.

1. Insightfully interprets data or information; identifies obvious as well as hidden assumptions, establishes credibility of sources on points other than authority alone, avoids fallacies in reasoning; distinguishes appropriate arguments from extraneous elements; provides sufficient logical support.
2. Accurately interprets data or information; identifies obvious assumptions, establishes credibility of sources on points other than authority alone, avoids fallacies in reasoning; distinguishes appropriate arguments from extraneous elements; provides sufficient logical support.
3. Makes some errors in data or information interpretation; makes arguments using weak evidence; provides superficial support for conclusions or solutions. Interprets data or information incorrectly;
4. Supports conclusions or solutions without evidence or logic; uses data, information, or evidence skewed by invalid assumptions; uses poor sources of information; uses fallacious arguments.
5. Does not evaluate data, information, or evidence related to chosen solution.

Synthesis

Suggest ways to improve/strengthen your chosen solution.

1. Insightfully relates concepts and ideas from multiple sources; uses new information to enhance chosen solution; recognizes missing information; correctly identifies potential effects of new information.
2. Accurately relates concepts and ideas from multiple sources; uses new information to enhance chosen solution; correctly identifies potential effects of new information.

3. Inaccurately or incompletely relates concepts and ideas from multiple sources; shallow determination of effect of new information on chosen solution.
4. Poorly integrates information from more than one source to support chosen solution; Incorrectly predicts the effect of new information on chosen solution.
5. Does not identify new information for chosen solution.

Grading

The Op-Ed will be graded using the “Blog Grading Matrix” found on Sakai.