Writing Opinion Articles
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Outline

Description: Democracy thrives when citizens from all walks of life can express their opinions. There have never been more opportunities to join the public conversation, but it can be hard to make oneself heard. Writers who understand what editors are looking for from opinion pieces, including the unspoken rules and assumptions, will have better luck placing their articles. This workshop will train participants to write and submit opinion articles to newspapers and magazines. Participants will learn how to hook readers, convey expertise in a compelling way, and maybe even change a few minds. The same skills are also applicable to blog posts, social media, and letters to the editor. By the end of the workshop, participants will have a polished op-ed ready to submit.

Week 1: Why write opinion?
- Introduction and discussion (60 minutes): Why do we write opinion? What do we mean by expertise? Discussion of our expertise and what brought us to class. Changes in the newspaper industry and what they mean for opinion writers.
- Lecture (40 minutes): What makes a good topic? News values and news hooks, timeliness, being provocative without being clickbait
- In-class writing exercise (30 minutes): brainstorming topics
- Questions and answers (20 minutes)

Week 2: The thesis
- Lecture (30 minutes): The thesis. Why it matters, how it differs from a topic, the various kinds of thesis, what makes a good one, and why it should (usually) be at the top of your piece.
- In-class writing exercises (60 minutes): Brainstorming theses, analysing examples of published work.
- Discussion (30 minutes): Who are your favourite non-fiction writers? Why? What makes a piece stick with you?

Week 3: Research and planning
- Lecture (60 minutes): How an op-ed differs from editorials, letters to the editor and essays; organizing the op-ed, marshalling the arguments. How to gather and use research. Citing sources, and ending with a kicker
- In-class exercises (30 minutes): Outline the op-ed; opening paragraph.
- Discussion (30 minutes): Common pitfalls

Week 4: Polishing our prose and our logic
- Lecture (30 minutes): Common sentence-level issues in opinion writing; logical fallacies.
- In-class exercises (60 minutes): identifying fallacies; fixing bad sentences; finishing the first draft.
• Discussion (20 minutes): Working with critique and with editorial feedback.
• Questions and answers (10 minutes)

Week 5: The draft
• Group work (60 minutes): Break into groups to constructively critique each other’s drafts; this is optional, and Kate will bring examples of professionally published work to critique and analyse for anyone who prefers that option.
• Lecture (30 minutes): Revision and editing.
• Discussion (30 minutes): Dealing with feedback from the public; diversifying opinion sections

Week 6: Pitching and submitting
• Lecture (60 minutes) Crafting the perfect pitch to the right editors. Dealing with rejection.
• In-class exercise (30 minutes): Make a plan of action for submitting the op-ed.
• Discussion (30 minutes): Final wrap-up, questions and answers.