Editorial Writing Guidelines
for WJEA’s Editorial Writing Write-off Contest

Newspaper staffs show leadership by forming an *editorial board* and writing *editorials* that reflect the collective opinion of the board.

Editorials can seem a lot like *personal commentary columns*, but they aren’t exactly the same. Personal commentary can take many forms; sometimes columns are meant to directly persuade people to change, and sometimes they are personal perspectives or musings on topics of interest. An editorial, however, is not personal and nearly always tries to achieve the former. It’s a call to action, even if sometimes the “action” is simply to maintain the status quo.

As a general statement, editorials convey this: “As student leaders, we on the newspaper staff think you should cut it out/keep it up/consider this idea. Here’s why.” It’s that last line that’s critical. As with any persuasive writing, you must support your call to action with facts and refute the other side if possible.

The writing style for editorials is not a standard formula every time, but generally you will find these elements in them:

- An *introduction*, in which you give a brief statement of background about the topic. Don’t assume the readers already know what’s going on.
- A *reaction* in which you summarize your position.
- A *body* in which you provide facts and details that support your position.
- A *refutation* in which you consider and address the other side, if it exists.
- A *conclusion* in which you recommend solutions, alternatives and/or direction as you restate your position.

Most Seattle Times editorials contain these elements. Here’s a recent editorial about the death penalty: [http://seattletimes.com/html/editorials/2022914195_editdeathpenalty16xml.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/editorials/2022914195_editdeathpenalty16xml.html)

Other tips for your editorial writing:
- Be fair; if you are critical of others, be sure to recognize their point of view.
- Tell readers where you are getting your supportive facts (attribute info to sources).
- Base opinions on fact; avoid repeating gossip and hearsay without demonstrating that you investigated to find the truth.
- State your call to action reasonably; avoid melodramatic language.
- Don’t take yourself too seriously, preach or be dogmatic.
- Keep paragraphs on the short side.
- Follow AP Style. Use the WJEA AP Style “cheat sheet” as a starting point.