

## Writing Editorials Tipsheet

By Doug Cospser, excerpted from “Inside Reporting” by Tim Harrower

A good reporter keeps his or her opinion out of news stories. A good editorial writer takes a news story or topic and builds on it with his or her opinion. Most publications need editorials to provide the personality and passion that news reporting usually doesn't allow. Editorials are the collective voice of the newspaper.

### Strong editorials:

- are usually from 300-500 words long.
- comment on current events, criticize or praise public officials, endorse candidates and explain what issues mean to the reader.
- are unsigned, meaning they represent the opinion of the editor or publisher in small newspapers or of the editorial board of larger newspapers.

## TIPS FOR WRITING STRONG EDITORIALS

- **Clearly distinguish editorials from news.** Usually, editorials are found only on the newspaper's editorial pages.

- **Keep it focused.** There's no time for rambling of the subject. Have a point and get right to it. Recap key facts and summarize your case like a prosecutor trying to convince a jury. The longer your editorial, the fewer people will want to read it.

- **Keep it relevant.** Select a timely, newsworthy topic that genuinely matters to readers – or, if necessary, explain why it *should* matter to them.

- **Base your opinion on facts.** Use strong quotes and attributed fact throughout to keep your opinion grounded in reality. If necessary, do your own reporting.

- **Take a stand.** Craft a strong thesis statement that urges action or invites reaction. Avoid broad, bland arguments. “Global warming is real,” rather than “Most scientists agree that the Earth is getting warmer.”

- **Attack issues, not personalities.** Avoid name-calling and mud-slinging. If someone's actions are a problem, criticize those actions and tackle the problem without cheap shots that make it personal.

- **Don't be a bully.** Be precise, subtle and clever. Sway and persuade, don't bluster and bludgeon.

- **Control your anger.** Beginners often find it easier to write an editorial (or a song or a poem) when they're hurt or angry. If you're angry, go ahead and write an editorial, but throw it away and write it again without the anger in it.

- **Write a strong lead and a solid finish.** Grab our attention at the start, maintain our interest, then wrap things up with a thoughtful ending. Don't let your arguments just fade away; reward us with a conclusion that smartly caps the case you've made.