

Writing about Science - Crafting an Op-Ed

Read an op-ed about a scientific topic

Read the free, open-access article in The Guardian - The world has a chance to end plastic pollution – the petrochemical giants mustn't spoil it - by Steve Fletcher.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/29/world-plastic-pollution-petrochemical-giants-un-treaty-2015-paris-lobbyists>

Discuss the op-ed

Discuss the op-ed by reflecting on and answering the following questions in a class discussion format.

- ✓ 1. **Do you think the author was effective at getting his readers to trust him?**
 - What makes him more of an authority on the topic of plastics compared to the general public?
- ✓ 2. **How did the author back up his point?**
 - What evidence did he provide, which even those individuals who may disagree with his opinion, will interpret as credible?
- ✓ 3. **What's new about what the author is sharing?**
 - Is there any new information for the public?
- ✓ 4. **Why should the author's readers care?**
 - How does the topic of plastic pollution impact the author's readers in their daily lives? How are the author's ideas helpful for his audience?
- ✓ 5. **Is the author's language effective for all his readers, regardless of their opinion?**
 - Does his choice of language utilize empathy and respect in pursuit of reaching all readers, giving them a better chance at changing minds?

Student Worksheet: Writing Your Own Op-ed

Directions:

1. Pick a TOPIC: Using the class-generated list, choose a topic for your op-ed.

2. STRUCTURE your op-ed: Begin writing your op-ed by filling in its structure using the template below.

Hook your audience: Write the beginning of your op-ed and focus on creating a “hook” for your audience—grab your reader’s attention. Be bold, authentic, and accurate. Consider telling a relevant story (keep it brief) or citing a new study.

Thesis: What is your core argument? Make it clear and concise, aiming for 1-2 sentences.

Argument:

1. First Point:

- a. Evidence
- b. Conclusion

2. Second Point:

- a. Evidence
- b. Conclusion

3. Third Point:

- a. Evidence
- b. Conclusion

Acknowledge Gaps & The Other Side: Address any flaws in your position, as well as any apparent counter arguments.

Conclusion: Reiterate your thesis in an impactful way that your audience will remember.

3. STRENGTHEN your op-ed: Answer the following questions. Based on your answers, add relevant sentences to your op-ed that will make your argument more robust.

Why should the readers trust you?

What makes you more of an authority on the topic you are writing about compared to the general public (your readers)?

Can you back up what you say?

What evidence can you provide, which even those individuals who may disagree with your opinion, will interpret as credible?

What's new about what you are sharing?

Is there something novel in what you are writing about? Is there new information for the public?

Why should your readers care?

How does your topic impact your readers in their daily lives? How are your ideas helpful for your audience?

Is your language effective for all your readers, regardless of their opinion?

Does your choice of language utilize empathy and respect in pursuit of reaching all readers, giving you a better chance at changing minds?

4. COMPLETE your op-ed: Finalize your op-ed, aiming to make it -

- Clear
- Concise
- Organized
- Impactful
- Convincing

5. PRESENT your op-ed: You will present your op-ed to the class by reading it aloud. Imagine the class is the general public and you want to convince them of your position. Avoid simply reading your op-ed. Instead, aim to “present” it in a convincing and impactful way.



Feedback Sheet for Students

Instructions: Before you and your classmates present your op-eds, read the following. You will use these questions to help give your classmates constructive feedback about their op-ed.

- ✓ **1. Clarity and Coherence:**
 - Was the main argument clearly stated and easy to understand?
 - Did the op-ed flow logically from one point to the next?
 - Were the ideas well-organized and connected?

- ✓ **2. Use of Evidence:**
 - Did the presenter provide sufficient evidence to support their argument?
 - Were the sources credible and relevant?
 - Did the evidence effectively strengthen the argument?

- ✓ **3. Engagement and Persuasiveness:**
 - Did the presenter effectively engage the audience and maintain their interest?
 - Were persuasive techniques, such as storytelling or compelling language, used effectively?
 - Did the presenter anticipate and address potential counterarguments?

- ✓ **4. Language and Style:**
 - Was the language clear, concise, and appropriate for the intended audience?
 - Did the presenter use vocabulary and terminology accurately and effectively?
 - Was the tone appropriate for an op-ed (e.g., persuasive but respectful)?

- ✓ **5. Overall Impact:**
 - What was the most compelling aspect of the op-ed presentation?
 - What could be improved to make the presentation more effective?
 - Did the op-ed leave a lasting impression or inspire further thought?