

Popular press/ Op Ed writing assignment

PSY 493

“The public is the only critic whose opinion means anything at all.” (Mark Twain)

Research is a cornerstone of science. But how are science and data communicated to the general public, advocates working on behalf of an issue, and policymakers in local, state and national levels? According to the APHA Media Advocacy Manual, *“Advocacy is used to promote an issue in order to influence policy-makers and encourage social change. Advocacy plays a role in educating the public, swaying public opinion or influencing policy-makers.”*

The goal of this assignment is to get you comfortable conveying concise and well thought out ideas to the public and to foster an intellectually open environment. Many pioneering psychologist (e.g., Alfred Binet, William James, John Watson) focused on expressing their work and ideas beyond scientific audiences and educated the public at large. These early pioneers in psychology were active in the sharing and selling of psychology to the larger public through informal non-technical articles – helping to create a climate of openness to our field. If the public is to understand psychology and its importance then we must convey meaningful communication with lawmakers, social institutions and the general public (Viney & Woody, 2003).

In this assignment, you will develop a psychology related advocacy piece in the form of a newspaper op-ed comment. This will give you a chance to translate science to practice/policy in order to promote a particular point of view about one of the many important issues in the field of psychology today. *This assignment directly relates to the course goal of: Develop and articulate ideas, critiques and conclusions relative to your study of Psychology.*

Newspaper Op-Ed

Introduction

Newspapers remain an important source of information for many people. Opinion pieces in newspapers offer an opportunity to reach hundreds, thousands or millions of potential readers, depending on the size of a newspaper’s audience. While letters may be published on any topic, those chosen most often for publication are linked in some way to current events. You will take one core topics or issue in our field today and develop an op-ed to a newspaper of your choice. You will then submit your assignment to the newspaper and provide documentation of submission **(via an email or printscreen, on Canvas)**

Instructions

Select the central thesis of your letter (main point) then choose your audience – public health professionals, the general public, residents of a particular community, elected officials, etc -- and the appropriate news outlet to reach that audience. *State the audience and the intended news outlet at the top of your assignment.*

Your op-ed will open with your main point, followed by supporting arguments. The piece should close with a reiteration of the main point and **a specific call to action to your audience.**

Your piece should make the issue compelling to your audience and convince them to take action. The tone you use depends on the issue you choose and the manner in which it is framed. Your central thesis and the arguments used to support it should relate directly to your audience. Originality and the ability to connect with the reader are very important criteria for editorial pieces.

Support your thoughts with evidence/science. Citations are necessary if you reference a journal article or specific data or source. Though citations are more commonly used in letters published in scientific journals, you should include them for the purposes of this assignment.

Instructions:

- Students must select a topic covered in class that is relevant to the current field of psychology.
- Length: Between 500 and 700 words [your newspaper guidelines may be different so talk to me if it is far off of this]. Include a word count at the end of the document that you submit.
- Selection of target audience and media outlet based on your topic and supporting arguments
- Use evidence/data to back up your view (use an APA citation here) – only one is required
- How well your supporting arguments relate to your topic and main point
- Your integration of your own ideas and perspectives
- BONUS: Catchy style, incorporation of additional research
- Newspaper examples: USA Today, The Coloradoan, The New York Times or your local paper (school or community)

Formatting & Submission Guidelines

- Length: Between 500 and 700 words [if the word limit is far different for an actual comment you plan to submit, please discuss with me]. Include a word count at the end of the document that you submit.
- Please do **NOT** include title pages; include only your name and the date in the document header. Include the link to the request for comment, or the target audience of your letter/where you submitted it to.
- Include documentation that you submitted it. This will most likely be a screen view of your email submission – so you will upload 2 documents to Canvas – your writing and proof of submission.

Submission Requirements:

- You need to upload your assignment to Canvas by the due date and time listed in the syllabus.
- At the top of your document: Your Topic/ Your Target Audience/ Your Media Outlet
- Give a word count at the end (see posted example)
- **Use citations in your paper and include these References at the end – BUT they do not count toward your word count**
- You need to document (print screen or official email) with your Canvas submission that you officially submitted your piece to the public for review.

Point Distribution: (100 points total)

- Relevance of topic (5 points)
- Makes a clear point of how you feel on the issue and why (35 points)
- Public call to action (25 points)
- Use of relevant sources to gather relevant scientific information (15 points)
- Creativity (5 points)
- Submitted to a source (15 points)

Ideas for where to submit – but you can still find your own source:

If you want to submit to USA Today...

- Submissions of **wholly new** subject matters and insights of interests of 650-900 words may be sent to USA Today at theforum@usatoday.com as pasted in text rather than an attachment
- Submissions should include name, address, day & evening phone numbers

If you want to submit to The New Yorker...

- Letter to the editor may be sent to themail@newyorker.com. This should also include your postal address and daytime phone number

If you want to submit to The New York Times...

- Submissions may be sent to opinion@nytimes.com. Typically, articles typically run from 400 to 1200 words, but submissions of any length will be considered. If you do not hear from them within 3 business days, you can send your article somewhere else.

If you want to submit to The Denver Post...

- Guest commentary submissions of 650 words or fewer may be sent to columns@denverpost.com along with a high-resolution photo of the author and a short biographical paragraph

If you want to submit to Colorado Daily...

- Contact Deanna Hardies at 303-473-1111 or email a query to letters@coloradodaily.com with your name and phone number.

If you want to submit to Colorado Springs – The Gazette ...

- Letters of 300 words may be sent to opinion@gazette.com with author's full name, address and daytime phone number OR Submitting directly at <https://gazette.com/editor/>

If you want to submit to The Steamboat Pilot & Today...

- Letters of 600 words or less may be submitted online at <https://www.steamboatpilot.com/contribute/letter-to-the-editor/>

If you want to submit to the Coloradoan....

- Letters to the editor of up to 250 words may be sent to the Coloradoan at opinion@coloradoan.com or submitted online at <http://noconow.co/opinionsubmissions>. Submissions should include the writer's address and phone number.