
UNIT 7 EDITORIAL WRITING

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7.0 INTRODUCTION

Editorials or leaders as they are often called are an essential and most important part of a newspaper or journal. These are written by the head of the editorial team or publisher of a newspaper or periodical journal. Editorials are for thinking people and not for a casual or non-serious readers. Leaders of ruling as well as opposition parties, bureaucrats, senior officers and diplomats read the views expressed in the editorials of good newspapers and news magazine with considerable seriousness.

Legendary editors Frank Mores said that in a democracy when the opposition is weak it is the job of the press to act as a strong opposition to the ruling party. While critically examining government policy and performance, editorials act as principal spokesperson of the opposition.

7.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to

- understand the importance of an editorial in a journal;
- appreciate the importance of an editorial in shaping the entire policy thrust of a newspaper's contents be it reporting of small or big events or production of supplements;
- understand the impact an editorial can have on social, political and cultural growth of readers in particular and society general;
- understand the impact of media on policy making by a government and its affiliates;
- appreciate the need for ethical professional standards of objectivity and balance in expression of opinion that is good for serving the larger interests of a society; and
- understand the importance and role of the press as guide and conscience keeper of a society.

7.2 NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL

A journal can be on any theme or a number of themes. There are journals on politics, economy, sports, science, health, environment, law, media, education culture, religious, international relations etc. Then there are national, regional and local newspapers. Every newspapers or journal has its own specific readership. These can have different and even conflicting ideas and ideologies.

Newspapers or journals know what their readers want from them. The editorials are often written keeping the readership in mind.

An editorial is a leading article or leader that presents the opinion of a journal or newspaper on an issue. It reflects the majority view of the editorial board. An editorial is usually unsigned. We can call an editorial an opinion piece on some development that makes news.

You cannot think of any good journal without an editorial. Because of their importance, editorials can be said to be the 'heart and soul' of a journal. In fact, it is the first introduction to a journal. It can also said to be the face of a journal. Newspapers or journals can be inclined towards any socio-economic or cultural group. These can be pro-rich or pro-working class. Editorials reflect their basic character.

7.2.1 Brief History of Editorial Writing

Editorials are the content component of a journal. In fact, the most intimate form of writing for communication is expression of a communicator's personal views or opinion on a subject, the communicator thinks to be of general interest. Viewed in this framework, the editorial writing started when someone thought of conveying the views he/she thought must be shared with everyone who is a member of our information society.

Editorials are basically expression of opinion by an individual or a small group which is viewed as being important for the people by and large. Editorials are not orders, announcements and general instructions or suggestions. The opinions and views contained in an editorial set the tone of public discourse in a democratic set up. Editorials are *vox populi*.

The earliest form of print media, as we call newspapers and periodical journals now, were the newsletters sea-goers used to write from their port- of- call to their parents and families to inform about their welfare. Only after German Goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg developed metallic types fonts in the 15th century, could newspapers come into existence. Therefore, the first editorial of print media history could not have been written before the 16th century. *The Courant* , the first successful newspaper with a fixed periodicity, carrying an editorial appeared only in the year 1702.

7.2.2 Evolution of Editorial as an Integral Part of Print Media

In fact, editorial writing as we understand it today evolved with the onset of professionalism in Indian newspapers. Professionally run newspapers segregated news from views. They earned their place due to the fact that news attracts a reader fast and views or opinions of editors/writers came in next. Newspapers were initially launched to express opinions of the persons who brought them out. All initial newspapers in India, Hickey's Bengal Gazette (1780) to Raja Ram Mohan Roy's *Sambad Kaumudi* (1821) or *Mirat- ul- Akhbar* (1822) were meant to express strongly held beliefs and views of their promoters. This trend continued till the Times of India (1838), The Statesman (1875) and The Pioneer (1864-65), all inspired by the British newspaper industry, appeared in India and gave new professional dimension to print media.

7.2.3 Editorial and Newspaper Readers

Editorials are no doubt the most important component of newspapers. However, their readership is limited. Several studies have revealed that of every hundred persons who read a newspaper or journal hardly 6 to 7 persons care to read the editorials. This is the reason why editorials are placed deep inside of a newspaper and other haughty stuff like crime or accidents finds place on the front page.

The poor readership of editorials of a newspaper can be attributed to several factors. However, the best explanation is that while general news interests each and everyone, editorials attract only serious minded people. Such people form the top layer of society and they often seek the opinions of learned editorial writers and seasoned media professionals for policy making.

Since newspapers are supposed to be vehicles of public opinion, the inputs from a good newspaper's editorials is supposed to represent public opinion.

Any government, especially a democratic government that has to face masses in elections to return to power has to know the public mind well to be able to formulate its policies that appeal to the masses.

Yet another reason for low editorial readership is the fact that most of us seek information but want to keep our beliefs and views secured from the views we do not like. Therefore, while news is received without inhibition we do not want or entertain opinions of others that can influence our thinking or pet beliefs.

However, a lot of newspaper readers repose an unflinching faith in views expressed in editorials and worship editors who write these editorials. Long after their retirement and death. Post-independence readers may remember editors like K. Rama Rao, M. Chelapati Rao, Edalta Narayan, Rusi Karanjia, Shamlal, Frank Moreas, R. Madhvan Nair and Giri Lal Jain.

In the world of Hindi journalism Ajaye, Raghuvir Sahay, Rajendra Mathur, Prabhat Joshi and Manohar Shyam Joshi left a deep impression on the minds of readers of the Hindi belt. As Hindi journalism grew at a fast pace in post-emergency era after 1977, the influence of these editors surpassed even those of big English language dailies like The Hindustan Times and The Times of India.

At regional and local level, many editors of smaller newspapers and magazines leave a deep impact on their readers. And party line news journals like New Age, Saamna, Panchjanya, Samajwadi Bulletin, Mamadhu Amma, Peoples Democracy, Jago Bangla and others almost motivate readers especially those who are party workers, camp followers or admirers of the ideological line of the party they like.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your Answer.
 2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What is an editorial?

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2. How old is editorial writing? When were first editorials written.

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7.3 CONTENT OF AN EDITORIAL

Contents of editorials differ from journal to journal. Here we must understand a simple fact i.e. no two journals, be they daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly are alike. Every journal represents a different thought stream; therefore, contents of all journals are bound to be different from each other. The editorials are written in keeping with the general content of a newspaper or journal.

We now live in a world of what is called *niche* journals. The journals on science, environment and health etc will have contents only of these areas. Naturally editorials will also centre around these subjects.

Whatever the public interest in World Cup Cricket a journal on science will not have an editorial on marks and demerits of the Indian team selected for the World Cup.

7.3.1 What Do All Editorials Have in Common?

However, all editorials have something in common. The common features of all editorials in all newspapers or journals big or small are:

- a journal's policy approach is reflected in views expressed in editorials on certain important developments affecting or attracting people in general. In professional terms this is called the 'editorial line' of a newspaper.
- a persuasive approach to attract and convert the readers to the editorial line taken by the journal towards that development;
- a rational presentation to look reasonable so that it could appeal to the minds of the readers; and
- an inviting and attractive writing style and good language.

All Editorials also have:

- an introduction, body and conclusion like any other media writing.
- a simple explanation of the issue, especially so if the issue is complex and needs elaboration to be understood by lay reader.
- an inviting new angle to attract readers.
- all good editorials talk and discuss issues and not personalities and they also refrain from name-calling.
- a good editorial should take a pro-active approach to be of constructive criticism and contain positive suggestions.
- a good conclusion that satisfies the readers by adding to their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

7.3.2 Journals and Editorials

We can broadly divide all journals on the basis of two categories: *Periodicity* and *Theme*.

Besides daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly, we have journals on politics and public affairs, economics and financial matters, sports, health, education, home, media, science, agriculture, law, women, children and so on and so forth.

It is only natural that an economic journal will carry an editorial on economic policy and market trends and a sports journal will carry an editorial on an event related to sports.

Different journals carry editorials not only in keeping with the theme of the journal but also in keeping with the taste and requirements (communication needs) of the readers of their journal. As can be easily understood, the taste and character of readership differs from journal to journal and from place to place.

7.3.3 Features of an Editorial

Editors generally look for the following things when writing an editorial:

- that the topic chosen for editorial is *current* and *timely*, and
- it is linked to some recent development of importance; and common interest.

- that the editorial meets the concerns of readers and is relevant to them.
- the topic of the editorial has relevance in catchment area of the publication (where the newspaper or journal is circulated and read).
- that the editorial piece is small and generally not more than 500 words; and
- that it is clearly written and has simple and grammatically correct language.

7.3.4 Language of an Editorial

The language of an editorial has to be simple, straight and sober. It should be such as to go straight to the point and leave no ambiguity in the mind of the reader. It should have force and flow but should be decent and uninvolved. There is no place for slangs and outdated expression in it. It should be impressive without being boisterous.

However, in campaign journalism the norms about language are not observed. Journals brought out by political parties often attack the political opponents of their party in language which is aggressive, indecent and even defamatory. That is the reason you must be wary of words while writing or expressing yourself in media.

Advocacy journalism is also making its appearance felt in Indian media world. While propagating their viewpoint, journalists often use language which is loud and less than decent.

However, use of simple, sober and non-aggressive language is the best as it leaves a lasting impression on the minds of the readers.

7.4. TYPES OF EDITORIALS

Editorials can broadly be categorized into the following:

- 1] **Appreciative:** These editorials admire people and organizations for something done well. They are not common as the traditional role of media in our democratic set-up is critical appraisal of some development and not to give commendation certifications.
- 2] **Critical:** These editorials constructively criticize actions, decisions or situations while providing solutions to the issues under discussion. The Immediate purpose there editorials is to get readers to see and be aware of the problem before country or society.
- 3] **Interpretative:** Editors often use such editorials to explain the way their newspaper thinks about how a sensitive or controversial subject should be handled by the authorities concerned or stake-holders.
- 4] **Persuasive:** Editorials of persuasion aim to give their readers a positive frame of mind so that they are encouraged to take a specific, positive view.
- 5] **Campaign Editorials:** Such editorials are mostly written in journals of political parties, religious organizations or in government publications in support of some programmes of larger social good like pulse polio drive etc.
- 6] **Advocacy Editorials:** Such editorials are often found in the publications of NGOs and other voluntary organizations in subject of the cause they work for. NGOs often work for poor and disadvantaged sections of society like

unorganized labor, poor women and children, and physically challenged people. Editorials in their publications seek support for work for such people.

- 7] **Academic and Philosophic Editorials:** Such editorials are written in academic journals and journals brought out by religious and spirituals organizations.
- 8] **Satirical Editorials:** Often the third editorial in some newspapers especially the Times of India, is a satire. The idea is to give some comic relief to the mind of a reader who is tired of reading heavy stuff on the editorial page. There are some journals based on satire.

However, satire and humor is a dying commodity in today's highly competitive world which is stressed by rat race to perform and surpass others.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your Answer.
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

- 1. What are the different types of editorials?

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- 2. Briefly explain the features of an editorial.

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7.5 PREPARING TO WRITE AN EDITORIAL

For writing an editorial, you need to move in a definite direction and take the following steps:

You should not start writing before you know what you are aiming at otherwise you will confuses your readers who will not know what they are supposed to do with your message. You must make up your mind. This will guide you about what you want to convey and how you say it through your writing.

7.5.1 Select a Topic

The topic you choose is the most important part of writing an editorial for your journal. The best topics are those pertaining to current issues, which are in public domain. Since everyone is interested in such issues, your editorial piece will get instant readership.

7.5.2 Firm up Your Approach

As a media person, you have your own views and opinion on important matters in public discourse. Besides your opinion on the policy of your organization on a topic of current interest also matters. Therefore, have a definite policy line on the issue.

For instance, one political party wants article 370 of the constitution granting special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to be abrogated. The other party wants it to be retained.

You need to ask yourself, are you for it or against. You have to choose before you write your editorial on this subject. You cannot be on both sides of issue. An editorial must express an opinion clearly.

7.5.3 Do Basic Work

First of all think of a good but small two-three word headline that will attract a reader's attention and motivate him/her to read your editorial.

While writing a good editorial you must have necessary facts, figures and even quotes of knowledgeable people in support of your line of argument. Moreover, you should use data to prove your line of argument. Steadily develop your case in support of your editorial line so that the strongest argument comes in the end and convinces the reader.

7.5.4 Keep Deadline in Mind

In media, you are always racing against time. Deadlines are important. While writing editorial that you should always keep deadline in mind. Since we are not supposed to leave any mistake in an editorial, it is revised again and again and this takes time.

7.6 HOW TO WRITE AN EDITORIAL

The following is a 10-point recipe for you to write an editorial:

- 1) **The Theme / Subject:** Present your views briefly but unequivocally using fact and figures where necessary.
- 2) **The Presentation:** Talk about the issue clearly and say why it is important.
- 3) **The Approach:** Look rational. Discuss the opposite viewpoint as well.
- 4) **The Language:** Use key words again and again for the readers to understand it well.
- 5) **The Thrust:** Encourage critical thinking and pro-active reaction.
- 6) **The Wordage:** Restrict it to 500 words.
- 7) **The Style:** Never use "I" in an editorial even if you are the boss of newspaper or periodical.
- 8) **Revision:** Once done you have to do two things – first revise it and then edit it. Revising should be done to ensure that your editorial is giving the message which you wanted to give to your readers. You can still think of a change in the basic argument put forth by you. Think if it is needed.

While revising the draft of your editorial you have to ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I been utterly truthful?

- Have I said all that I needed to say?
 - Have I been appropriately diplomatic and fair?
 - Do I have three parts to the piece—an opener, a middle, and a closer?
 - In my opener, have I made my points quickly and clearly? And concretely?
 - Have I avoided a slow wind-up that unnecessarily postpones the message?
 - In the middle, have I proved my points with specifics?
 - Is the structure immediately apparent to my readers? Have I used informative headings?
 - Is my closer consistent with the rest—yet expressed freshly? Have I avoided lame repetition?
- 9) **Editing:** Editing is needed to remove any mistakes of spelling or grammar and to time your language. But revision and editing should be done with a cool mind.

Editing is a different art but you need to be careful with your language. You need to check your draft on the following counts.

- can I save some words here?
 - Is there a better way of phrasing this idea?
 - Is my meaning unmistakable?
 - Is the expression relaxed but refined?
 - Does one sentence glide into the next, without discontinuities?
- 10) **Conclusion:** In an editorial, your conclusion should sum up all that you have written about. The conclusion should create an impact on the minds of readers and they should feel satisfied even if not convinced.

7.7 EDITORIALS IN THE CHANGING MEDIA SCENARIO

Change is the law of nature. As a society changes with time media too has to change and reinvent itself. The pace of change can be slow or fast depending on several factors. The massive changes in information and communication technology (ICT) in the past few decades or the computer/internet revolution as we call it also has had a deep impact on media world. The journals and their editorials have also changed with the change in technology.

New Information technology has converted our world into a global village. There is deluge of information. Therefore, there is no need for editorial writers now to draw attention of audience to those information inputs that used to be privilege of the elite and were not in public domain. Readers now a days know facts and are aware of many things but they are often not able to comprehend and analyse what they know.

With so much of information, all around the audience also makes up its minds on various public policy issues of economy and polity. This has limited the role of editorial writer as an opinion maker and perspective giver.

In the past decades, we have also witnessed death of ideology. Debates are, no more done on communism or capitalism. Political parties do raise slogans but without ideological moorings. Literature and other areas of creative expressions are also losing ideological undertones. This is also impacting media and editorial writers. The emerging scenario is witnessing editorial writing without any ideological basis. In the 20th century, journalism ideology was a guiding light for most of the editorial writers.

Moreover, due to impact of modernization, ethical standards have also undergone a change, social norms are changing and traditions are fast disappearing giving way to new behavioral patterns. We now live in an open society. The media has to cater to a new generation of readers who are different from their parents generation.

Now the editorials are no more heavy on thought and lack theoretical background. The reason is easy to understand. Often editorials, even in well-reputed journals betray absence of any sense of history. Editorials or historicals are now being addressed to mass audiences instead of a sober and thinking class as before and this has changed both their language and content.

Other things being equal, it is obvious that the wider your knowledge of men and affairs the more successful you are likely to be. Such knowledge must come chiefly through reading, and the habit of reading is one you would do well to acquire.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your Answer.
 2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. How do you plan to write an editorial?

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2. How is the content and character of editorials changing?

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have told you about the importance of an editorial in a newspaper or periodical journal. Our effort has been to familiarize you with all aspects of editorial writing. To do so, we gave you the definition of the editorial, listed its basic character, its evolution and historical background and the art of editorial writing.

We have also tried to familiarize you with various types of editorials and the changing scenario of the world of editorials. We have also told you about the language, size and placement of the editorial and the need for balance and accuracy so that the editorials written by you have credibility and are read with respect.

7.9 KEYWORDS

- Campaign Editorials** : Such editorials are mostly written in journals of political parties, religious organizations or in government publications in support of some programmes of larger social good like pulse polio drive.
- vox populi** : It is a Latin words. Its direct meaning is ‘Voice of People’.
- Editorial** : It presents the opinion of a newspaper on an issue. It reflects the majority view of the editorial board.
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7.10 FURTHER READINGS

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 6. Gillan, C., & Evans, H. (2010). *Essential English for journalists, editors and writers*. Random House.
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7.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. An editorial is a leading article or leader that presents the opinion of a journal or newspaper on an issue. It reflects the majority view of the editorial board.
2. Only after German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg developed metallic types fonts in the 15th century, could newspapers come into existence. Therefore, the first editorial of print media history could not have been written before the 16th century. *The Courant*, the first successful newspaper with a fixed periodicity, carrying an editorial appeared only in the year 1702.

Check Your Progress 2

1. There are eight broad types of editorials, namely Appreciative, Critical, Interpretative, Persuasive, Campaign Editorials, Advocacy Editorials, Academic and Philosophic Editorials and Satirical Editorials.

2. Generally, an editorial contains the topic which is *current* and *timely*, and it is linked to common interest, relevant to readers, generally not more than 500 words. And that it is clearly written and has simple and grammatically correct language.

Check Your Progress 3

1. For writing an editorial, you need to move in a definite direction and take the following steps: Select a Topic, Firm up Your Approach, Do Basic Work, and Keep Deadline in Mind.
2. There is no need for editorial writers now to draw attention of audience to those information inputs that used to be privilege of the elite and were not in public domain. Readers nowadays know facts and are aware of many things but they are often not able to comprehend and analyze what they know. Now the editorials are no more heavy on thought and lack theoretical background. The reason is easy to understand. Often editorials, even in well-reputed journals betray absence of any sense of history.

