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# UNIT 3 EDITORIAL WRITING

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## Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
  - 3.1.1 What is an Editorial?
  - 3.1.2 Importance of an Editorial
- 3.2 Parallels of Editorials in other Media
  - 3.2.1 Television Editorials
  - 3.2.2 Radio Editorials
  - 3.2.3 Internet Editorials
- 3.3 Writing an Editorial
  - 3.3.1 Length of an Editorial
  - 3.3.2 Language of an Editorial
  - 3.3.3 Glossary
  - 3.3.4 Steps to Writing Your Editorial
- 3.4 Types of Editorials
  - 3.4.1 Staff Editorials vs. Front Page Editorials
  - 3.4.2 Signed Vs Unsigned Editorials
  - 3.4.3 Third Editorial or Entertainment Editorials
  - 3.4.4 Critical Editorials
  - 3.4.5 Persuasive Editorials
  - 3.4.6 Interpretative Editorials
  - 3.4.7 Advocacy Editorials
- 3.5 Structure of an Editorial
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After having read this unit you will be able to

- Read and analyze an editorial in a news paper;
- Identify the various types of editorials;
- Understand the different styles of editorial writing; and
- Write an editorial.

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Newspapers report the news. When newspaper reporters tell a story, it is only facts and we readers can form our views. Journalists generally have to leave their opinions out of their writing. They have always been told to be unbiased and not to take a stance. Yet most newspapers do have opinions. This is a class of writing called “editorials” found in your newspaper every day.

Where can you find them? Are they on the same page everyday? Who writes them? Who is offering this opinion? Why do we need to write the editorials? This unit will answer all these questions.

### 3.1.1 What is an Editorial?

An editorial is an article that states the newspaper's views on particular news, events or an issue of concern. It is the official stance of the publication.

You can find them at the same place on the same page of the newspaper, everyday. This page is called the editorial page and the place is the left hand column of the page, from top to bottom.

### 3.1.2 Importance of an Editorial

An editorial is usually written by the editor, one of the associate or deputy editors or one of the writers on behalf of the editor. These opinions reflect the stance of the newspaper and do not have bylines.

Politicians, bureaucrats and the common people – all want to know the stand of the newspapers on matters which make a difference to society. Why is this view so important? Well, the press is the fourth estate and the watch dog of society. The rest of the world would definitely want to understand the policy of the newspaper, on issues of importance. The editorials not only persuade the reader to change their views, but also help them to form views. This creates a major public opinion and public wave. Hence, the interest of politicians and bureaucrats in editorials is justified.

The editorial acts as:

- A voice of the common man.
- Advocate of human rights
- Critique of government policies
- Interpreter of the Constitution
- Forecaster of political and social changes
- Informer and analyst of complicated issues
- Promoter of worthy activity
- Problem solver of any issue of social importance

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## 3.2 PARALLELS OF EDITORIALS IN OTHER MEDIA

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By now it must be clear to you, that the editorial is not only the view point of the media organization, but is also an important and essential part of the newspaper and is found in every issue. Does this mean that only the print media enjoys this privilege of commenting? Do we see editorials on the television? Do we hear them on the radio and in the virtual world do we read these on the internet? This section will answer all the above questions.

### 3.2.1 Television Editorials

It is surprising, but there is no exact parallel of a print editorial in the television news channels. There are panel discussions and analysis programmes, which are conducted by anchors of the channel and the expert is also a journalist working for the channel. These are the nearest television got to editorializing.

Some channels have fixed slots for these programmes whereas some do not. Television news channels, being guest and expert based, most of the times have outsiders commenting on various issues and the channel bears no responsibility for these comments.

In the case of Doordarshan, the official government media, the stand Government of India has to take on various issues, are telecast as statements made by the ministers or government public relation officers.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- Note:** a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.  
b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

i) Do you listen to the radio?

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ii) AIR, BBC, VOA or private FM channels, which of these channels do you listen to?

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iii) Which one do you like the most and why?

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iv) Does it have serious or light content?

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**3.2.2 Radio Editorials**

By now you must have understood that radio is a medium which is most convenient for information gathering and has the maximum reach. But one fact is also true that the private FM stations have not been granted the rights to broadcast news. So most of the serious and developmental content is audible only on All India Radio, the

official radio. AIR is the news station and broadcasting serious content along with entertainment is its agenda.

The private stations like Red FM, Big FM, Radio Mirchi and others have only entertainment based programmes but many a times as a humor or pun an issue is commented upon by the jockey. This is the nearest these stations can come to editorializing.

It is surprising, that no views of the government or the AIR are broadcast as editorials. Statements of ministers or government Public Relation Officers, on issues of importance are aired from time to time and analysis of these, as a part of news bulletin, is done sometimes. This is the nearest AIR gets to being a parallel of a newspaper editorial.

### **3.2.3 Internet Editorials**

Internet or web journalism has its vestiges in the print media. If it is a website of the newspaper or magazine the editorial column is absolutely there at the allotted space, every day.

In case of other websites, the views of the organization are put on the site and regularly updated. In fact most of the content could be opinionated. Cyber media can also be called a comment based media.

Exact parallels between editorials cannot be drawn on the cyber media but comment is free here.

Blogs initiate a debate on an issue where the owner of the site gives his or her points of view and invites comments from the audience

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## **3.3 WRITING AN EDITORIAL**

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An editorial is one of the writing styles used to express an opinion or reaction to timely news, an event or an issue of concern. Most editorials are used to influence readers to think or act the same way the writer does. Not all editorials take sides on an issue but have one of the following four purposes:

- i) Inform: The writer gives careful explanations about an important issue.
- ii) Promote: The writer tries to promote a worthy activity.
- iii) Praise: The writer praises a person or an event.
- iv) Entertain: The writer entertains the reader with light and humourous issues.

### **3.3.1 Length of an Editorial**

An editorial is averagely of 500 words. Three editorials of 500 words each can fit into a full page editorial column of, for example *The Economic Times*. Some newspapers have editorials of 750 words. In such cases there are only two editorial columns, for example *The Indian Express*. There are exceptions to the rule when one editorial fits the complete length. This is normally in stories of grave importance.

### **3.3.2 Language of an Editorial**

There are some magic tricks which when used can make a most effective editorial. These are clarity, rhythm, good word choices, active sentence construction, seamless transition and evocative phrasing. The assumption is that an editorial writer knows the language well.

**Simple tips**

- 1) Get the reader's attention quickly by the first paragraph being written in attractive language.
- 2) Write short paragraphs and vary the length of sentences for effect.
- 3) Write with strong verbs and adjectives.
- 4) Use transitional devices for continuity.
- 5) Avoid redundancies in an editorial.
- 6) Use of one word substitution is prominent in editorials
- 7) Use active verbs while writing an opinion
- 8) Use concrete nouns while writing a comment.

**Special tips**

- 1) Both direct and indirect speech can be used while writing an editorial.
- 2) Metaphors and similes or both to be used if required
- 3) A mixture of abstract and concrete expresses better while commenting.
- 4) Rhetoric can be used.
- 5) Direct affirmations and negations too can be written.
- 6) Use of exclamations is justified in persuasive writing.
- 7) Apostrophe and within quotes can be paraphrased.
- 8) Dangling modifiers are helpful in editorial writing.
- 9) Inadvertent comment can be written in loaded words.
- 10) Sequence of tenses can be past – present – future to create effect.

**3.3.3 Glossary**

- Editorial** : An article expressing opinion of the newspaper on certain issues.
- Masthead** : The information printed on the first page on the top with the name, ownership, logo, rate and date of the newspaper.
- Op-ed page** : Page opposite the editorial which contains nationally syndicated columns and good writers pieces.
- Editor** : A person who decides what news will go in the paper and where it will appear.
- Editorial board** : A seven member board headed by the publisher which decides what issues the newspaper will offer an opinion on.
- Editorial policy** : Policy of coverage of news and stances of the newspaper decided by the editorial board.
- Column** : An opinion piece that expresses the writer's own view and carries his or her name and often a picture.
- Syndicated column** : Columns sent by associations which buy and sell stories, features, etc.
- Letters to editor** : Letters of feedback or opinion on various issues by the readers.

- Middle** : A humorous write up in the centre of the editorial page in a box.
- Editorial writer** : Any member of the editorial board who researches and writes the editorials that represent the newspaper's position on most issues.

### 3.3.4 Steps to Writing Your Editorial

**Selection:** Choose an issue—your editorial could be about how the readers could help the environment and ecology sustenance, inform the public about a particular scam, praise, an effort by a group who has helped to remove garbage dumps and recycle it or make the people aware of a social worker and his campaign on abolishing child labour or any other idea that can be used as an editorial.

**Collecting:** Gathering support – gather as many details to convince others about your opinion. These could be facts or evidence, written statements from sources or authorities on the subject, comparisons to similar situation to support your argument and be able to counter argue.

**Connecting:** Remember to brain storm before you write the first draft . The main body should have clean accurate details and examples. Give strong examples at the beginning and at the end. Show the opposing arguments and their weaknesses. Offer a solution in the end.

**Correcting:** Getting it right – your editorial should be clear and forceful. Do not preach. Be honest and accurate.

Sample of what could go into the five paragraph editorial:

- i) A personal experience, a thesis statement
- ii) Explanation of the other side of the issue
- iii) Examples to support your view points
- iv) Reasons for your view point
- v) The last paragraph should restate your thesis statement and end on a positive note.

#### Tips for writing Editorials

- 1) Don't use the word I. Your life is not interesting. Your personal experiences are tiresome. Using the first person also sounds preachy and righteous, which alienates readers.
- 2) Avoid sarcasm. You aren't very funny. Too much sarcasm comes off as immature and can ruin your credibility.
- 3) The sky is not falling – do not exaggerate. It makes you sound too emotional and irrational.
- 4) Challenge authority not personality. Attacking coaches or politicians simply attract letters to editors but attacking their ideas, policies and actions is great editorializing.

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## 3.4 TYPES OF EDITORIALS

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An editorial as a genre is considered a type of opinion discourse, that arms to persuade the reader to accept new opinions. Although the editorial is thought to be the personal

opinion of the newspaper, it is based on social opinions. It also evaluates news events and propagates ideologies. Let us see how the editorials can be classified. There are several parameters on which editorials are categorized. The first one being their location, the second one their bylines and the third their content.

### 3.4.1 Staff Editorials vs. Front Page Editorials

Staff editorials comment on the opinion page written by the editors or writers working for the newspaper.

Front page editorials are opinions of the editor-in-chief or owner of the newspaper in an editorial column format on the first page of the newspaper. These are written only in great emergencies or on topics of supreme importance.

### 3.4.2 Signed vs. Unsigned Editorials

The staff editorials are unsigned editorials, which mean that the name of the author is not given. It implies, that it is the opinion of the newspaper. Front page editorials are usually signed and this is to stress the importance of the viewpoint of not only the newspaper but also of the editor-in-chief or managing editor. Generally these people are persons of stature, with importance in society and their opinion makes a difference. After the cease fire of the Gulf War, *Times of India's* front page editorial Pax Americana signed by the Editor-in-Chief Dilip Padgaonkar was very popular. Events like September 11, deaths of nation heads and change of governments have also seen front page signed editorials written.

### 3.4.3 Third Editorial or Entertainment Editorials

Traditionally on the opinion page there are three editorials. The first two are on serious news issues. The third editorial often is humor based and entertains. Many a times newspapers follow this in their policy and other times they don't. At least once a week the edit pages of newspapers have a third editorial. This can or cannot have a byline, depending on the policy of the newspaper.

### 3.4.4 Critical Editorials

As the name suggests a critical editorial seeks to point out a flaw, judge severely and find fault. This is likely the type of editorial you are used to seeing.

### 3.4.5 Persuasive Editorials

A persuasive editorial seeks to persuade the readers about a sensitive issue. Is it the best way to convince the masses that your opinion is better? Yes, normally it uses valid examples that play on your emotions and also make sense. Remember, it is an editorial where the writer presents both the sides of the issues and illustrates why your opinion is logically better.

### 3.4.6 Interpretative Editorials

An interpretative editorial takes a complex issue and breaks it down. It tries to answer questions like why, how, whom, what, when and where. In addition such an editorial will also comment on the positive and negatives of the issue.

### 3.4.7 Advocacy Editorials

These are editorials which advocate certain causes or issues. These explain the significance of an idea and tell the reader, why whatever happened is important. Such editorials promote or advocate changes. They may also add solutions and

recombine a course of action. However, the overall tone of the editorial is neither negative nor is it point-by-point criticism.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.  
b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

i) How many types of editorials are there?

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**3.5 STRUCTURE OF AN EDITORIAL**

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- The editorial is first of all a text. So remember no pictures or graphs can go into it.
- It will have an introduction, a body and a conclusion.
- Introduction – In the introduction answer the 5 Ws & 1H to attract the reader’s attention.
- Body – In the body persuade the reader by identifying the opposition, show why it is wrong and give your reasons for not supporting the issue.
- Conclusion – Prompt the reader into action by giving solutions. You can end with a famous quotation or a rhetorical question.

Use the SPECS formula:

- State the problem.
- Position on the problem.
- Evidence to support the position.
- Conclusions: Who’s affected and how.
- Solutions to the problem, at least two should be given.

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**3.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you learnt the importance of editorials in newspapers and their placement every day on the same page and same columns.

You have also learnt of the parallels television, radio and internet have of editorials and how they differ from newspapers in content and style.

This unit also teaches you to write editorials in correct length, language and usage akin to the policy of the organization.

In the second part of the unit you have seen the various types and styles of editorials. By now it must be clear that editorials are written with different slants and objectives, putting forth the views of the organization on a particular topic or event.

We hope now you will not skip the editorial page and will read the editorials judiciously. Also you will be able to write editorials with a critics' view point.

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## **3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

The answers to all these questions from i) to iv), will depend entirely on your preferences.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

There are many types of editorials eg. Staff, Front Page, Signed, Third, Critical, Persuasive etc.



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