

DIPLOMA IN MEDIA & COMMUNICATION

MCJ 301
PRINT JOURNALISM

The logo for Stamford Online is positioned behind the text. It features a stylized orange and blue graphic on the left, followed by the text 'stamfordonline' in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. Below this, the words 'EDUCATION' and 'LEADERS' are written in a smaller, grey, uppercase font.

Week 14

Lesson Objectives

- After this chapter, students should be able to:
 - Explain the importance of editorials in contributing to community conversation;
 - Write editorials that explain, evaluate or persuade;
 - Understand the role of editorial cartoons

Key Topics

- Writing Editorials
- Where Do Editorial Ideas Come From?
- Editorials that Explain
- Editorials that Evaluate
- Involving Readers
- Letters to the Editor
- Choosing Cartoons



Writing Editorials

“The editorial page of the paper should begin where the rest of the paper leaves off.”



Writing Editorials

- The reader should find ideas about the things reported elsewhere in the paper. The key word here is **ideas**
- An **editorial** is an article that states the newspaper's ideas on an issue. These ideas are presented as opinion
- Editorials appear on the newspaper's **editorial page**, a page which includes editorials, columns, opinion articles, reviews and cartoons

Writing Editorials

- If the paper contains more than one opinion page, the others are called **op-ed pages**
- Another important item that appears on the newspaper's editorial page is the **masthead**, also known as a staff box, which includes a statement providing the details of publication - who are the editors, photographers and other key staff members, as well as a synopsis of the newspaper's editorial policy

Writing Editorials

- The editorial policy will generally tell who determines the content, if letters to the editor are accepted, if advertising is accepted, what the subscription rates are, how errors will be corrected, among other important information
- Since a newspaper is not a living, breathing human being, it cannot form these ideas or opinions

Writing Editorials

- The **editorial board** is made up of living, breathing human beings who determine, hopefully by consensus, the opinions that will be presented in the editorial
- On some small newspapers, the editorial is determined and written by the editor or publisher based on his/her own observations and research

Writing Editorials

- The **editorial board** is a group of people, usually the top editors, who decide on a plan for each editorial that will appear in a newspaper



Writing Editorials

- An editorial should be organized in 4 steps:
 1. State the subject and your position on the subject in the introduction.
 2. Discuss opposing points of view.
 3. Prove your position with supporting details.
 4. Draw a conclusion.

Writing Editorials

- Bear Facts staffers are encouraged to write editorials this way:
 - State the problem or **situation**
 - State your **position**
 - Give **evidence** to support your position
 - State and refute the position of the other side in the **conclusion**
 - Offer two possible **solutions** to the problem

Where Do Editorial Ideas Come From?

- The newspaper is the voice of the community
- The editorials are the voice of the newspaper
- This voice can inform readers, stimulate thinking, mould opinion and occasionally move people to action
- To be worthy of print space, the editorial needs to tell the reader something that would not be discussed in a straight news story

Where Do Editorial Ideas Come From?

- However, the editorial must be researched carefully and just as thoroughly as a news story
- The newspaper's reputation is based on the accuracy of the supporting material found in an editorial

Where Do Editorial Ideas Come From?

- Remember that the editorial is not the opinion of the writer, but represents the opinion of the newspaper or editorial board. There is no byline on editorials in most newspapers
- Therefore, it would be silly to use words such as “I think” or “in my opinion” in an editorial. In reality, these words often weaken your argument anyway
- It is a much stronger statement to say “This is an injustice” than to say “I think this is wrong.” Don’t leave any doubt in your reader’s mind about the stance taken in the editorial

Editorials that Explain

- **Editorials that explain** are somewhat like expository essays
- They attempt to interpret or inform rather than to argue a point of view
- The only expression of opinion comes in the interpretation of the facts



Editorials that Explain

- These editorials explain topics such as the elimination of a sports program, a change in the grading system or in the type of scheduling, or perhaps the sudden departure of an administrator or faculty member
- They are most effective when they explain what has taken place, give a detailed description of the causes, and highlight the importance of the topic

Editorials that Evaluate

- **Editorials that evaluate** focus on actions or situations that the editors view as being wrong or in need of improvement—or that are praiseworthy
- If the editorial criticizes, it should always be constructive. Emphasize the positive about what you are criticizing, or your readers will not trust you
- If you criticize, you have an obligation to offer an alternative solution or course of action

Editorials that Evaluate

- If the editorial praises, there should be specific reasons for doing so
- Perhaps an organization or individual has gone above and beyond the call of duty and the staff feels there should be some recognition

Involving Readers

- A newspaper editorial staff has the responsibility to create community conversation
- In order for readers to have their turn to speak in this conversation, the newspaper must provide space for dialogue on current topics of concern
- Readers are given their turn in two ways: letters to the editor and in opinion features

Involving Readers

- Letters to the editor may be in response to something the newspaper has printed in an earlier issue, or they may be in response to something going on in the school or local community that is causing some concern
- Sometimes the letter will prompt the editorial staff to write a response if there is some sort of misunderstanding of facts

Involving Readers

- However, in most cases, the letter writer should be given the opportunity to state his/her opinion without comment from the staff, even if the letter criticizes something that the newspaper has done
- The newspaper has had its say; now it is the readers' turn

Letters to the Editor

- It is a healthy sign for the newspaper when readers submit letters
- That shows they are actually reading the paper and are using the op-ed pages as they should be used—as a public forum
- If some controversy is stirred because of what appears in the paper, that, too, is a healthy sign
- That shows that the newspaper is causing readers to think and to get involved

Letters to the Editor

- If a paper is not receiving letters to the editor, here are some steps the staff can take to generate more:
 1. Set up rules, and follow them
 2. Focus on school issues
 3. Identify letter writers, but allow for exceptions when letters might be published anonymously



Letters to the Editor

- If a paper is not receiving letters to the editor, here are some steps the staff can take to generate more:
 4. Encourage serious discussion
 5. Verify all information, including the name of the letter writer
 6. Run letters promptly
 7. Run as many letters as possible

Choosing Cartoons



Choosing Cartoons

- Cartoons can do much more than enrich popular culture and make us laugh
- Editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast, who invented the Democratic donkey, the Republican elephant and the modern image of Santa Claus, helped bring down New York City's corrupt political boss William Marcy Tweed

Choosing Cartoons

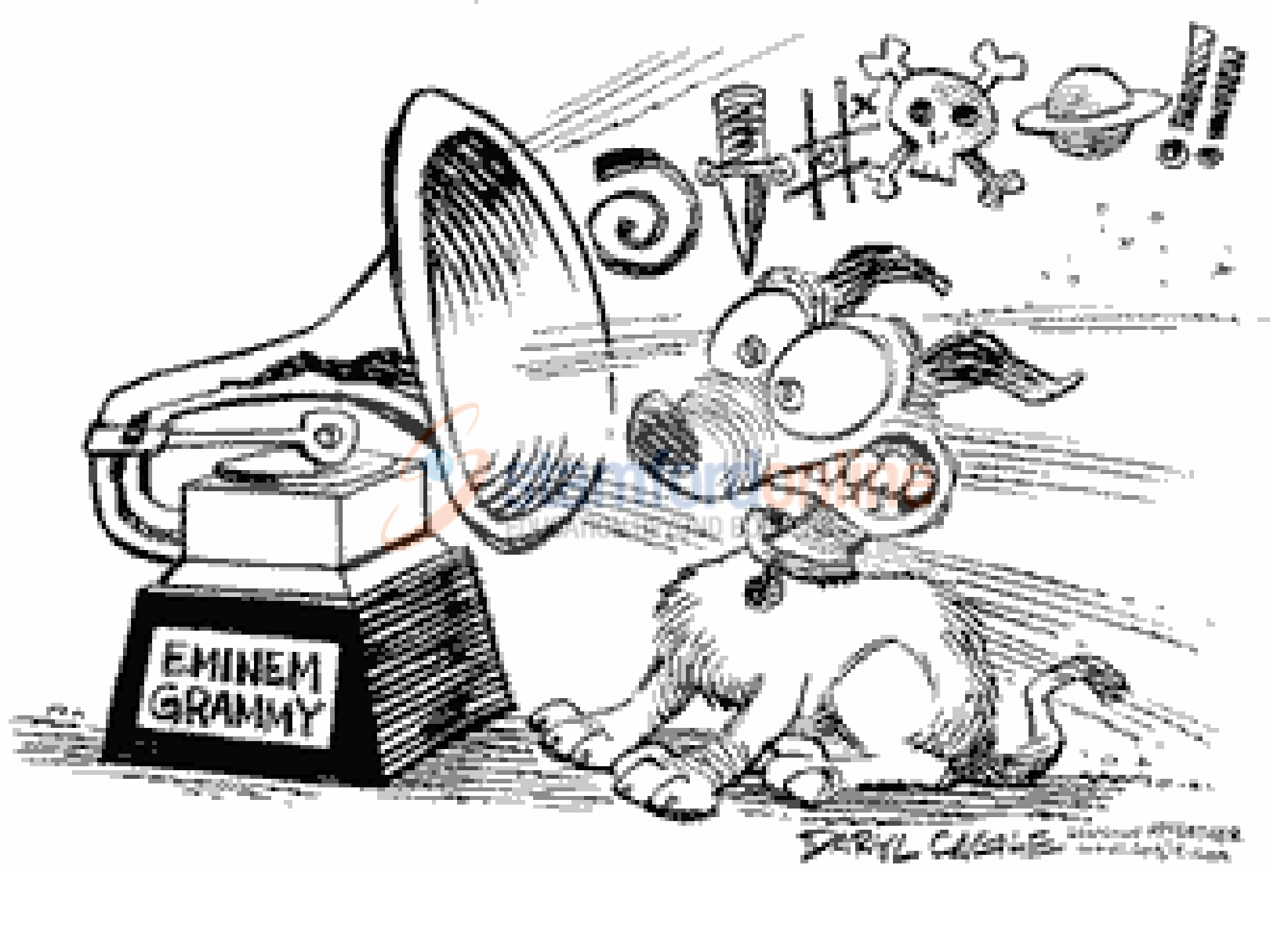
- Tweed didn't worry much about newspaper stories, because, as he said, most of his constituents couldn't read anyway
- But he did worry about his constituents' understanding of Nast's razor sharp cartoons
- Editorial cartoons can be a powerful form of expression. They can grab the attention of readers in a single glance

Choosing Cartoons

- Unfortunately, some are so vague that they are hard to understand
- One study reported in Journalism Quarterly revealed an overwhelming failure of nationally syndicated cartoons to get their message across
- Most interpretations offered by readers were not at all what the cartoonist had intended

Choosing Cartoons

- Your goal, when selecting cartoons, is to make sure that the readers get the intended message
- An effective way to achieve this is to have a cartoon reinforce a message that is contained in an accompanying editorial
- In addition, cartoons should be timely and well-drawn





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