

# **Biography Projects: OP-ED ARTICLE**

## **Difections: Op-Ed Article**

Write an op-ed article similar to those that appear in major newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Your goal is to connect an important event and/or controversy, from your Biography Project time period, to a historical topic, theme, and/or event discovered in your research.

Your paper must be approximately 350-500 words, double-spaced, with 12-point font and one-inch margins. Your audience for this essay is not an academic one but the general public. You should write in a way that will engage an average newspaper reader. Because this assignment asks you to simulate a newspaper column, be sure to keep to the word limit!

See additional page for more detailed instructions.

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First, you must select a specific, concrete event and/or controversy from the time period. You should select an issue that your person would feel passionately about. Next, you must select a specific, concrete relevant historical topic or theme that can help shed light on their ideals, morals, political beliefs, etc.. The historical topic or theme that you select must be historically accurate and written from the point of view of your person.

Before you begin writing your essay, you must submit a prospectus of your topic to receive final approval. Turn in a 3X5 notecard with the following information: Your name, name of your person, topic/issue you will write about, Historically accurate newspaper name and place, why you chose this issue for your person.

**Prospectus due** \_\_\_\_\_.

I will also provide you with sample op-ed articles. For more specific advice on how to write an op-ed article, see the History News Service at <http://www.h-net.org/~hns/opedstyle.html>.

## Contents, Approach, and Form

1. Set the stage in the first sentence. A striking opening is the key to getting the attention of the person who counts: the editor. So work on it until it's right.
2. Quickly bring in the historical insight, issue, or comparison. Hook the past to the present, and vice versa. But remember that you are trying to strengthen readers' understanding of the issue and your person's opinion.
3. Develop the historical background.
4. Thicken and intensify the historical issue. Provide details.
5. Use historical examples and quotations whenever possible.
6. Conclude in the final one or two paragraphs. Make or repeat your historical point: things are not as they seem; the real issue, opinion, and **solution**.

## Style and Tone

1. **Simplify.** Don't use long words or neologisms. "Jefferson's aim" (not "the Jeffersonian project"), "organizations of men and women" (not "gendered associations"), "contemporary architecture" (not "poststructural bridges," unless they've collapsed). You're writing for your fellow citizens, not your teachers.
2. **Compress.** Except when asked, don't submit more than 500 words of text. Consequently, re-word everything to shorten it. For example, "the election of Franklin Roosevelt" should be "Roosevelt's election." Even such small changes can create needed impact and provide more room for you to make additional points.
3. **Shorten.** Keep sentences brief; remember that with narrow column width, even short sentences can take up many lines. Also keep paragraphs short; in newspaper writing, one-sentence paragraphs pass muster. Keep quotations short, too.
4. **Explain.** In fact, explain everything. Your readers are intelligent, but they may not be informed about what you write. Therefore, on first mention, it's not "the Wagner Act," but "the 1935 Wagner Act, which legalized union organizing and collective bargaining;" not "NOW," but "the National Organization for Women (NOW);" not "Burgundy," but "Burgundy, the ancient French province known for the quality of its wines." Such brief explanations take up space, but they are essential for comprehensibility.
5. **Repeat.** Not to the point of boredom, of course, but for impact. Don't be afraid to insinuate the same point a number of times in fresh words.
6. **Be direct.** Don't pull your punches; instead, fly your own colors, make an argument, take a stand. Show where history may reveal something and what it may reveal.
7. **Keep to one subject.** Don't develop more than a single thesis or present more than a single argument. Your aim is to convince, and to convince upon a single, brief reading.
8. **Be your Biography Project person in his/her own voice.** Make clear why you believe what you are arguing, not why others believe it. The essay is a personal communication.

**Essay due** \_\_\_\_\_.

# Biography Project: Op-Ed Article Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Person \_\_\_\_\_

	Introduction, Conclusion (Position and Persuasion), Topic Sentences, Title (20%) <b>1 X 20 =</b>	Body, Development, Organization (40%) <b>2 X 20 =</b>	Vocabulary, Mechanics (Punctuation, Spelling, Caps, Grammar, Typos) (20%) <b>1 X 20 =</b>	Effort, Improvement, Presentation (20%) <b>1 X 20 =</b>
<b>Distinguished (or "WOW!") (19-20)</b>	Creative and catchy introduction and conclusion; problem is strongly introduced; goal is fulfilled; the problem/situation is clearly introduced; possible solution is revealed; high level of insight is achieved. Conclusion proposes a viable and intelligent solution; the reader is moved to rethink or act. Compelling Title.	350-500 words. Gives reader dynamic impression and profound understanding of the problem/situation; aptly uses many examples (more than three) to persuade; creative transitions; uses similes and metaphors to enhance writing; explores deep qualities of the issue; weaves essential facts and elements into argument artfully. No repetition. Breaks the mold.	Professional. Sophisticated. High level, active words are selected deliberately. There is no more than one mechanical error in the entire argument. Sentence structure is varied. Reads like a professional editorial from the <i>NY Times</i> or <i>Rolling Stone</i> .	Evidence of substantial time spent; student is working at highest potential; details are thorough and factual. There are no errors in content. <b>Student chose a challenging topic.</b> Revisions are obvious.
<b>Proficient (or "Pretty Decent") (16-18)</b>	Solid introduction that uses "catchy" intro device and title; purpose/position is clearly delineated; solution is indicated; solid conclusion –point is clearly made. Clear topic sentences. Opinion provides insight about issue. Reader is convinced by a feasible solution at the end.	350-500 words. Gives reader vivid picture and deep understanding of the argument; strong and detailed examples (at least three) are provided to persuade; sophisticated transitions; uses similes and metaphors; explores the issue thoroughly; creative presentation of argument. Very little or no redundancies. Good job.	Most vocabulary is sophisticated and used properly. Vocabulary is varied and correct. There are no more than 3 mechanical errors in the entire paper. Paper is vivid – with some revisions.	Evidence of time. Student is working near highest potential; some improvement; polished presentation. Student sought help in or out of class. Revisions made.
<b>Satisfactory (or "Fair") (13-15)</b>	Basic needs of introduction and conclusion are met though argument may not be totally clear; topic sentences generally clear; intro and conclusion meet minimum length requirement. Reader may not be totally convinced by the argument the writer has made as the solution may not be possible or logical or very strongly presented. Basic Title.	350-500 words. Argument is made but in a predictable and/or awkward way; little or no examples (less than three supporting points), details and/or similes/metaphors; may contain awkward or lacking transitions; argument not very compelling. Redundant points. OK job with revisions.	Language is basic – solid in some areas, weak in others. Author may use simple words and take few risks. Vocabulary is somewhat dull and/or repetitive and/or used incorrectly. Essay is legible but may contain multiple errors. Needs more life!	Adequate amount of time is evident though more attention should probably have been given; similar errors in previous stories; little or no improvement; neat presentation. Some revisions made.
<b>Unsatisfactory (or "Needs A Lot of Work") (0-12)</b>	Intro and/or conclusion too short, missing, or confusing. The situation and/or solution are not clear or are missing; topic sentences are missing or confusing. The reader has not been persuaded of anything from the argument. Conclusion does not offer any possible viable solutions. Inappropriate or missing title.	Doesn't fulfill word requirement. Uses sweeping generalizations with no supporting examples; little or no detail or description; missing or confusing transitions; little or no attempt to use similes/metaphors; information is unfocused or confusing; paragraphs too long, too short, or indented. Redundant. We learn not much or nothing.	Misuses basic vocabulary. Ignores basic rules of mechanics (capitalization, sentence structure, spelling, etc.) Essay reads at a low-level. Difficult to read because of a number of distracting errors.	Repeated errors; little or no time or care; no attention paid to basics; gross errors; sloppy; little or no revision evident. This paper is not up to par with high school writing.