



After studying an issue or time period closely, historians and other social scientists might decide to make recommendations to the general public about that issue or situation. By doing so, their ideas might have real consequences on the lives of real people. An opinion piece or position paper is an essay in which you state an opinion or take a stand on a given topic and use evidence in the form of logic, quotations, or facts to back up that opinion or position.

Below are some steps you might wish to make in creating your opinion essay:

Define and limit the problem.

Most social problems are complex and thus difficult to define. Try to define the problem narrowly enough to enable you to discuss and solve it in a few pages of writing. For example, in this case, trying to discuss all of the problems related to local government would be difficult to do in a book, much less a paper. However, discussing and solving one specific government problem might be more manageable.

Research the problem.

Once the problem is defined, you must learn more about it. The two most likely ways of researching are problems are to study documents or to talk to experts on the subject. Documents can be found in the library, on the Internet, in textbooks, on videos, or on CD-ROMs. As you collect and review documents, take careful notes. You may want to cite some of these documents in your essay.

In addition to documents, you can also consult experts or persons who are knowledgeable about the subject. These can be other researchers who have done work on this topic or key stakeholders or players involved in the subject. Interviews can be formal or informal, and they can be conducted in person, by phone, letter or email. As with documents, it is important to keep records of the information gained.

Evaluate the possible solutions or responses and recommend one.

Now, you are ready to begin forming solutions. But clearly it won't do to offer easy "pie-in-the-sky" solutions that have no chance of being accepted. You need to make sure that your ideas are reasonable. Do the benefits outweigh the costs? Do you think that the public will buy into it?

Consider the intended audience.

Remember that your audience may not share your knowledge and the vocabulary that experts on the subject may use. Thus, you must write in a way that makes sense to people who may never have studied the problem. In order to do this, you may need to use synonyms for specialized terms. You may also need to offer some historical background information on the problem.

Outline the essay.

Since opinion pieces are to be read quickly by a general audience, they should be relatively short (no more than three pages) and clearly organized. The audience should never be confused about what you are arguing or where you are heading. To do this, you should create an outline of the essay before writing it. Most opinion essays are organized in this way:

- Introduction (explanation of problem)
- Statement of recommendation or solution
- Supporting evidence for the solution
- Conclusion (restatement of solution and brief explanation of the significance of adopting that solution)

Draft the essay.

Once you have created the outline, you are ready to begin writing. On a first draft, you should concentrate on getting all of your main points out, rather than on selecting the best word or writing the best sentence. Be sure to remind yourself often what your main point or argument is so that you stay on track!

Seek feedback on the essay.

All good writers seek feedback on their drafts. They want to make sure that they are making the best argument they can and that they are communicating as clearly as possible. Ask a friend or family member to read the draft and offer you their thoughts. Ask them the following questions:

- What is my main point?
- Did you understand everything in the essay?
- Was there anything that was unclear?
- Did you buy my argument?
- What would make my argument more convincing?
- Are there any words or sentences I should change?

Revise the essay.

The best writers also are willing to rewrite their papers to make them stronger. Review the feedback you received on your draft. Ask yourself honestly whether you could improve the essay by revising it. Make changes as needed. Do you need to alter your argument? Do you need more supporting evidence for your opinion? Could you make your points more clearly?

Proofread and edit the essay.

Before submitting your essay, it is important to make sure that it is error-free. When a piece of writing has grammatical and other errors, readers may end up rejecting the author's argument. To make sure that your paper is polished, spend time going over each sentence to make sure that it is grammatically correct.