

Writing An Opinion Article And Why It Is Important – White Paper

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WRITING AN OPINION ARTICLE AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Opinion Articles Are Important

On Saturday, November 14 2015, I wrote and submitted my first opinion editorial (Op-Ed) article, for publication, to the Washington Post. (*See Appendix I-II*) What I thought was a daunting task, turned out to be one that I enjoyed and plan to do again. During the writing and research process, I gained a tremendous amount of information and learned various techniques that will help me, and I think others, write future Op-Eds for publication.

Writing an Op-Ed is important to ensure that diverse perspectives and voices regarding subjects that are interesting, relevant or lacking attention, are heard. News outlets tend to follow a certain theme and general topics. (Hall, 2013) Op-Eds give audiences and news outlets broader voices that allow for the transmittal of important information, feelings, ideas and perspectives. Without Op-Eds, the ability to give raise to issues that fail to be at the forefront readers' mind will not be possible. Both, newspapers and readers need more Op-Eds articles to increase quality information and prevent lack of relevant news pieces. (Hall, 2013)

Topic and Outlet Matter

Before writing an Op-Ed, a writer must first select a topic worth reading. Writers should select a topic that is interesting and relevant to an audience and ultimately a news outlet. (Jarmul, 2013) Topics that align with current "trending" topics such as, education, technology, politics or social agendas can generate great attention. (Shapiro, 2009) It is also important to select a news outlet that fits the topic of your Op-Ed. If your topic is about political lobbying and this is a topic commonly covered by the New York Times or Huffington Post, try to target those outlets for publication. ("How to Write," 2015). Having an interesting and relevant topic, coupled with the right outlet, will improve the chance of your article being published.

Organization Is Key

When organizing and writing your article, use a concise and coherent approach. Utilize shorter well-organized paragraphs and sentence to allow active readers to skim. Have a striking

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hook to grab the reader's attention. (Lori, 2015) As you write, use your own voice and increase interest by telling your story that relates to the topic. It is important to limit the use of jargon, as readers may not understand uncommon language. (Jarmul, 2013) Similar to a striking hook, devise a closing that pulls the entire piece together and drives home your opinion. Using these techniques will improve the readability of your Op-Ed and increase its chance of publication.

Understand The Requirements

News outlets have specific guidelines for article submission. Be sure to adhere to the method of submission, due-date and word count. Also, give as much information about yourself as required. This includes your, full name, email, phone number, address or even a picture. (Hall, 2013) Meeting all submission requirements will allow the news outlet to contact you if additional information is needed and improve your articles chances of being used.

Before Submitting

Before submitting your article, gain perspective from trusted colleagues or friends by having them review work. This process will help you discover areas in your article that require clarity. Furthermore, the review process can help identify areas requiring reinforcement and additional supporting facts or ideas. Ultimately, the review process provides general feedback and confidence that your work is at its best before submittal

Be Confident and Write

Overall, it is important to be confident and write. Op-Eds are opinion-based pieces that require writers to step out of their comfort-zone and share important information with others. It is normal to feel a sense of fear when sharing your thoughts and idea with complete strangers and potentially large audiences. However, fear less about the writing process and more about not sharing your important thoughts with others that stand to benefit from your work. Op-Eds are critically important to audiences and news outlets. Thus, more Op-Eds should be written.

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Appendix I: Opinion Editorial Article Submitted to The Washington Post on 11/14/2015

Title: Why Are We Not Talking About “Sustainable” Education Systems?

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Date: Saturday, November 14 2015

New K-12 education initiatives, digital assessments, curricula, instructional best practices, data driven methodologies and online platforms continue to flood the education sector, year after year. All with the intention, we suppose, to improve, instruction, classroom environment and student achievement. With anything new, comes change and with change comes a cost. However, do we know what the cost is?

As a K-12 educator, for almost a decade, I’ve experienced countless school, state and national systems that came, went, or in some way, stuck around in parts. More often than not, these systems, whether digital or not, were hailed to be the next “best thing” since sliced bread. However, many of these systems likely failed to mature to expectations, in whole or in part.

As I’ve worked in Newark, New Jersey as a teacher and administrator, I think about Mark Zuckerberg’s 100 million dollar gift to the City of Newark, with the lofty goal to “[fix the city’s failing schools](#)”. Roughly, five years and 200 million dollars later, analysts and writers suggest that the efforts of the project [partially or completely failed](#).

Although Zuckerberg generously donated 100 million dollars, another 100 million was raised to match his donation. This matching likely came from a mix of, local businesses, efforts of local leaders and taxpayers, like you and I. With failed projects, like the Zuckerberg “fix” and countless others like it, I ask myself, why aren’t educators, parents, state officials and taxpayers, talking more about effective and sustainable systems?

Before we think about sustainable systems, I believe we must think about the life cycle of a project - from start to finish. Studies show that [failure-rate of large projects range from 50% to 80%](#). These are significant numbers when related to systems in a small school or even a large district, such as Newark. In terms of taxpayer dollars, quick number crunching could estimate millions, if not billions, of dollars are either lost or underutilized.

Unsuccessful projects fail to serve the main purpose of taxpayers’ dollars. That is, maximizing the return on taxpayers’ dollars that are invested in the education system, by improving student achievement with tangible and measurable proof. The length of time a system is meaningfully used, is a function of a project’s success. Likewise, the longevity of a system is a function of producing a higher return on investment (ROI) in education. With stark failure rates of projects and systems, the conversation around sustainable systems is increasingly important.

Large corporations, like KPMG, General Motors and Apple, place emphasis on analyzing success rate and sustainability of projects and systems because of the impact success rate has on ROI. If large companies with billions of dollars in annual revenue are placing high emphasis on these areas, why aren’t we doing the same in a multi-million dollar education sector?

To understand the overarching question in this article, a clear definition of the term sustainable education system is necessary. Sustainability is commonly used in the context of ecology and environmental systems. For the purposes of this article,

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sustainable education system is defined as the ability for a given system to last over a significant period. Essentially, sustainability is a product of successful projects. If we improve success-rates of projects, we ultimately increase sustainability of our educational systems and initiatives.

In this context, sustainable education systems could last a period of three to five years, or more, depending on the perspective of the reader. The important idea here is that sustainable education systems will have a higher ROI than those that fail to mature. Sustainable systems have a high probability of maximizing taxpayers' dollars, reducing staff and teachers' learning curve from year-to-year and increasing student achievement.

Generally, most companies and businesses understand that experiencing project failure is inevitable. The important questions to ask are why these projects fail and what can we do to improve success-rates. A 2010-2011 interview-based study of software development projects, by [Geneca](#), revealed that 75% of project participants lack confidence in the success of projects before they ever begin. Another common theme found across failed projects, is the [lack of attention to user requirements](#) and weak support by upper level management. Other common factors of failing projects are; lack of community or stakeholder involvement and unmanageable, unreasonable or unattainable expectations.

Regardless of the factors that cripple a project, we must begin having conversations that refocus and analyze investment priorities in education. Once key individuals begin having meaningful discussions about sustainable systems in education, I believe we will move towards defining frameworks that allow projects and ultimately systems to be more successful and sustainable.

Defined frameworks will; provide more feasible project deliverables, produce higher ROI's, and will increase school productivity and achievement. Let us not squander another 200 million dollars. Our education system and ultimately our children deserve more sustainable systems.

Appendix I: Confirmation of Opinion Editorial Article Submission

From: oped@washpost.com washingtonpostcontact@gmail.com
Subject: Washington Post op-ed submission receipt confirmation
Date: November 14, 2015 at 8:43 AM
To: dowaynedavis@gmail.com



This is an automatic response confirming receipt of your op-ed. Thank you for your submission. There is no need to respond to this email.

Op-ed articles must be exclusive to The Washington Post. Articles sent to multiple media outlets or posted online will not be considered for publication. Anonymous articles will not be considered, nor does The Post permit the use of pseudonyms.

To ensure that your submission is readable, the article should be plain text, not an attachment. The maximum length is 800 words; there is no minimum length.

Your article will be reviewed by our editors in two to six business days. The Post makes every effort to ensure that authors of declined submissions are notified by e-mail; however, due to the high volume of submissions, we guarantee only that authors of accepted op-eds will be contacted.

Please ensure that your spam blocker allows messages from this email address in order to hear the answer on your op-ed.

Thank you,

The Washington Post
Editorial Department

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