How to Write a Convincing Opinion Article

1. Be Brief

Articles for The Student Life’s Your Opinion section should be 500-700 words. You can’t solve the world’s problems in 700 words, focus on one idea or issue and have one clear objective. You are trying to cover too much if you can’t explain your message in one or two sentences.

2. Know your Limitations:

We’re college kids, not experts. Do your research and listen to the people around you, but often, you won’t know it all. Be confident and convincing, but don’t be presumptuous — don’t pretend to understand stuff you don’t.

3. Know your Audience

Always keep your readers in mind, when choosing a topic and crafting a piece. Ideally, your audience is the entire Claremont Consortium. Sometimes the group you are really addressing will be smaller, and in that case, extend the importance of your piece to the larger group: why should we all care?

4. Start with your argument

Do not bury your argument at the end of the piece. You need to grab the reader’s attention up front. If you choose, for stylistic purposes, to open with an anecdote or loosely connected lead, be sure to keep it brief and quickly move to your argument.

5. Keep it Simple

Anyone should be able to understand your argument. Use short sentences. Avoid technical jargon, acronyms and obscure references. Cut long paragraphs into two or more shorter ones. Only use technical details when they are essential to your argument. Using simple language doesn’t mean simple ideas. It means successfully conveying your solutions to people who lack your expertise.

6. Don’t Equivocate

Always come down hard on one side of the argument. Don’t waste words giving too much background information. Don’t “clear your throat” with witty or historical asides. Get to the point and convince the reader that reading your article is worth the effort.

7. Provide Real Life Examples.

Evidence makes your article authoritative. When you suggest a solution, give an example of it working elsewhere. Look for great examples that breathe life into your arguments. Avoid abstraction. Use specific references and comprehensible data.

8. Address the “So What?”
Imagine you are a busy person reading your article. At the end of each paragraph ask yourself, “So what? Who cares?” Your article should answer these questions. Personal experience can provide a compelling story and draw the reader in. How is your argument relevant? Why is reading your article worth anyone’s time?


Don’t leave the reader hanging — offer some solutions or a better approach. Don’t stop at analysis or criticism. Solutions can be humble and tentative, but make an effort to address the problem you articulate. Otherwise, what’s the point?

10. Please please please, Think of a Good Title

It is the first introduction to the argument. It should be clear and catchy. It may be the reason readers choose to read or not to read your article. Strong titles often include verbs. Avoid a title that starts with “On...” or the trope, “In defense of...”

11. Choose Your Topic Wisely

Topic is your primary concern. The subject of your article should be relevant, thoughtful, and true to you. Don’t write an opinions article for the sake of writing an opinions article. If you don’t care about your topic, there is no way that the reader will. If you’re not passionate, walk away.

Sources Used: The Atlantic-Community.org, adapted from suggestions by Dr. Chantal de Jonge Oudraat from the United States Institute of Peace
For some inspiration: Get Better, by Frank Lagan
http://tsl.pomona.edu/articles/2011/11/18/opinions/786-some-inspiration-for-pomona-get-better