



*Editorial writers enter after battle and shoot the wounded*

*Neil Goldschmidt, American Businessman  
and Politician (1940–...)*

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## 26.1 What Is an Editorial?

An Editorial is defined as an opinion or a view of a member of the editorial board or any senior or reputed faculty written in a journal or newspaper. The statement reflects the opinion of the journal and is considered to be an option maker. If you have been asked to write an editorial it means that you are an expert on that topic. Editorials are generally solicited.

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## 26.2 How Is the Topic for an Editorial Chosen?

This is decided by the members of the editorial board and is usually related to important work which is about to be published in the journal. If you are invited to write an editorial on a topic of your choosing you should preferably write one on a general or public health problem that might interest a wide readership [1].

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## 26.3 What Should be the Contents of an Editorial?

It has been said that ‘Editors, by and large, are reticent people, with a magnified sense of their own importance. Well, this may hurt some, but before they jump at our throats, let us clarify that we belong there as well’. The editorial should not look like an introduction to an original article or a self-glorifying piece of fiction.

Editorial writing has been compared to a double-edged sword, you can be apolitical and pragmatic but at the same time dogmatic in your views. The majority of editorials provide the readers a balanced view of the problems raised in a particular research paper and place them in a wider context. But there is no harm in going to extremes if the data supports your view. However, you should not mock the paper's authors [2].

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## 26.4 What Is the Basic Information Required for Writing an Editorial?

First, read the paper for which the editorial has been asked again and again. Do a literature search and critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the study. Read about how and why other authors came to similar or different conclusions. Discuss whether or not the findings are important [3].

An editorial should be brief, about one to two pages long, but it should be powerful. The language should be a combination of good English and good science. The writing can be 'embellished by language but not drowned in it'. While a good editorial states a view, it does not force the reader to believe it and gives him the liberty to form his own opinion.

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## 26.5 What Are the Steps Involved in Writing an Editorial?

These are:

- Choose a topic intelligently.
- Have a catchy title.
- Declare your stance early.
- Build up your argument with data, statistics and quotes from famous persons.
- Provide possible solutions to the problem.
- Follow a definite structure consisting of an introduction, a body that contains arguments and an end with a tailpiece of a clear conclusion. It should give the reader a chance to ponder over the questions and concerns raised.

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## 26.6 What Are the Types of Editorial?

Editorials can be classified into four types. They may:

1. **Explain or interpret:** Editors use this type of editorial to explain a new policy, a new norm or a new finding.
2. **Criticize:** this type of editorial is used to disapprove of any finding or observation.
3. **Persuade:** These encourage the reader to adopt new thoughts or ideas.
4. **Praise:** These editorials admire the authors for doing something well.

## 26.7 What Is the Purpose of an Editorial?

An editorial is a personal message from the editor to the readers. It may be a commentary on a published article or topic of current interest which has not been covered by the journal. Editorials are also written on new developments in medicine. They may also cover non-scientific topics like health policy, law and medicine, violence against doctors, climate change and its effect on health, re-emerging infectious diseases, public interventions for the control of non-communicable diseases and ongoing epidemics or pandemics [4].

## 26.8 What Are the Instructions for Writing Editorials in Major Journals?

Many editorials written by in-house editors or their teams represent the voice of the journal. A few journals allow outside authors to write editorials. The details for these suggested by some of the leading journals are given in Table 26.1.

## 26.9 What Is a Viewpoint?

A Viewpoint is a short article that focuses on some key issues, cutting-edge technology or burning topics or any new developments in the field of medicine. It can be a 'personal opinion' or any piece of information, which gives the author's perspective on a particular issue, supported by the literature. Viewpoints can also be unencumbered by journal policy. The normal length of viewpoints can flexible. The BMJ, for instance, also allows viewpoints to be written by patients.

Viewpoints may share a few common features with commentaries, perspectives and a focus which is a brief, timely piece of information. It is like a 'spotlight' that contains information on research funding, policy issues and regulatory issues

**Table 26.1** Details about Editorial

| Journal                                | Word limit | Instructions  |
|--|------------|---|
| <i>British Medical Journal</i>         | 800        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Editorials are usually commissioned</li> <li>• They no longer accept unsolicited editorials</li> <li>• Topic should be of current interest</li> <li>• It should be evidence based</li> <li>• Should interest an international audience</li> <li>• Authors with financial ties to industry are not generally invited</li> </ul> |
| <i>New England Journal of Medicine</i> | 750        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers commentary and analysis on a current-issue NEJM article.</li> <li>• Maximum of one figure or table</li> <li>• Up to ten references</li> </ul>   |

whereas a commentary is an in-depth analysis of a current matter which can also include educational policy, law besides any other seminal issue.

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## 26.10 Conclusions

- An editorial is written to provide a crisp, concise overview of an original article. It is generally deemed to be an honour to be asked to write an editorial.
- One needs to follow the general instructions for writing editorials for a particular journal.
- It should have an objective and the flow of ideas should be clear.

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## References

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