

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**

RAFT, Graphic Organizer, Drafting, Sharing and Responding, SOAPStone

My Notes

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**KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS**

In terms of syntax, sentence variety, level of vocabulary, use of second person (“you”), diction, use of figurative language, text features, etc., how does an editorial compare with other informational styles typically used in literary texts? Why are the styles different?

**Learning Targets**

- Compare and contrast the persuasive elements of two editorials.
- Craft an editorial of your own, carefully considering audience and context.

**How to Write an Editorial**

You have now had the opportunity to read and analyze a couple of editorials. What advice would you offer a friend who is about to write an editorial of his or her own? Be prepared to share your advice with the class.

**Before You Write**

- **Brainstorm for topics:** Choose topics in which you have a genuine interest and some prior knowledge. Be sure they are issues that are debatable. Do not, for example, argue for school violence because it would be difficult to find anyone in favor of such a thing. Many editorials are written as responses to news articles or other editorials, so be alert for interesting ideas while reading the paper each day.
- **Research your topic:** Ask opinions, conduct interviews, and locate facts. While editorials are opinion pieces, those opinions must still be supported with evidence.
- **Get both sides:** In addition to having support for your position, be certain that you have information about the other side of the issue. You will need this soon.
- **Consider your audience:** Use SOAPStone as a prewriting strategy to consider details of your audience. What does your audience currently believe about this issue? Why? How will they respond to you? Why? What can you do to persuade them to change their minds? How will using slanted language affect your credibility and persuasiveness with them?
- **Write a thesis:** Before writing your draft, you must have a clearly stated position on this issue with a strongly worded reason for your position.
- **Write out your topic sentences and/or main ideas:** This preparation will help you organize your thoughts as you draft your editorial.

**Writing a Draft**

- **Get to the point:** Your first paragraph should immediately bring the reader’s attention to the seriousness of the issue. Create a “hook” that will sell the piece to the reader: a current event or imminent danger, for example. You should then provide a concise summary of what you’re going to tell the reader and include your thesis statement.
- **Provide context:** Give your readers important background information about the issue. This background should not be common knowledge (e.g., “drugs are dangerous”), but should frame the issue and define any key terms that your reader will need in order to understand your argument.



# How to Write an Editorial

## During Reading

2. The issue for the next two editorials that you will read is whether to raise high school graduation requirements. As you read the editorial on the next page, use the following graphic organizer to keep track of your observations. Complete the chart after you have read and analyzed the two editorials.

Author	Reasons For	Reasons Against	Strongest Statement of Position
Jack O'Connell			
Nick Thomas			
You			
A Person You Know			

## Editorial

**Pro and Con:** Raising Graduation  
Requirements for High School Students**Time to raise the bar in high schools**

by Jack O'Connell

**1** The most important challenge we face in public education today is to improve high schools so that all California students graduate prepared to succeed in either college or the workplace. Today, far too many of our 1.7 million high school students are prepared for neither the demands of skilled employment nor the rigors of higher education. Employers consistently complain of graduates who lack critical problem-solving and communications skills. More than half of students entering California State University need remediation in reading or math. It is clearly time for us to re-examine high school in California, to raise the level of rigor we expect of all of our students and begin preparing every high school student to reach higher expectations.

**2** How we meet the challenge of improving high school student achievement will determine the futures of our children and their ability to compete and succeed in the decades to come. Moreover, how we respond to this challenge will significantly affect the economic and social future of our state.

**3** Research shows that students who take challenging, college-preparatory courses do better in school, even if they started out with poor test scores and low expectations. Students who take rigorous courses are also less likely to drop out, and they perform better in vocational and technical courses.

**4** Our high schools today struggle with an achievement gap that leaves African-American, Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged students lagging behind their peers. A failure to provide and expect all students to take demanding academic coursework has also created a high school “reality gap:” While more than 80 percent of high school students say they intend to go to college, only about 40 percent actually take the rigorous coursework required for acceptance at a four-year university. The numbers are even lower for African-American graduates (24 percent) and Latinos (22 percent).

**5** Many students are not aware that the “minimum requirement” courses they are taking aren't providing the rigorous foundation that will prepare them to fulfill their dreams after high school. In some cases, students are steered away from tough courses or find them overenrolled. The result is thousands of students who must spend significant, unnecessary time and money after high school if they are ever to fulfill their dreams.

**6** To reverse this trend, we must make rigorous courses available to all of our students. We must redefine high schools as institutions that provide all students with a strong academic foundation, whether they are bound for college or the workplace after graduation.

**7** I am proposing a High Performing High Schools Initiative that will raise expectations for our high schools and high school students. It will provide better training and support for high school principals. And it will establish a state “seal of approval” process for high school instructional materials, giving districts guidance in choosing materials that are standards-aligned, and therefore more rigorous than many used in high schools today.

## GRAMMAR &amp; USAGE

## Diction

Diction plays an important role in establishing the tone and the credibility of a writer. Notice how O'Connell uses a formal and educated diction, which reflects and enhances his position as the state superintendent of schools. He chooses words such as *remediation* instead of *help*, *rigorous* instead of *difficult*, and *overenrolled* instead of *full*.

## My Notes

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Argument implies the existence of counterargument. After all, if everyone already felt the way Mr. O'Connell feels, there would be no need for him to construct this argument.

- What, then, is the position of those with whom Mr. O'Connell is arguing?
- Which pieces of evidence might they dispute?
- What sort of response might they write to his piece?

# How to Write an Editorial

## My Notes

**8** It is simply wrong to decide for students as young as age 15 whether or not they are “college material” and capable of challenging courses in high school. Guiding students to an easier academic pathway, even if they show little early motivation or curiosity about possibilities beyond high school, virtually guarantees they won’t be prepared with important foundational skills. It limits their opportunities for years to come. Years ago, this was called “tracking.” Students facing childhood challenges such as poverty or the need to learn English—the description of fully well over a quarter of California’s students today—would be tracked to less-challenging courses and denied opportunities after high school as a result.

**9** By advocating for tougher curriculum in high schools, I am not in any way suggesting vocational education programs should be eliminated. In fact, legislation I introduced to improve high school achievement would reward schools that collaborate with businesses or labor unions to expand such successful programs as career partnership academies. These academies have been successful where they have provided rigorous academic instruction geared toward a career pathway.

**10** The truth is that we can no longer afford to hold high expectations only for our college-bound students. Today, all of our students need the skills and knowledge contained in the curriculum that was once reserved only for the college-bound. Strong communications skills, knowledge of foreign language and culture, higher-level math and problem-solving skills are needed in technical trades as well as white-collar professions. The job of K-12 education in California must be to ensure that all of our students graduate with the ability to fulfill their potential—whether that takes them to higher education or directly to their career.

## Editorial

### New Michigan Graduation Requirements Shortchange Many Students

by Nick Thomas

**1** Imagine waking up in the morning to find the electricity is out, or a pipe has burst or your car won’t start. As you look through the Yellow Pages for a technician, do you really care if that person has a working knowledge of matrices, oxidation numbers, and Kepler’s laws of planetary motion?

**2** Apparently the state of Michigan does. Its new high school graduation requirements will assure that every graduate, regardless of their career choice, will have taken advanced math and science classes.

**3** Among the new requirements are one credit each of algebra I, geometry and algebra II and an additional math class in the senior year. Also required is one credit of biology, one credit of physics or chemistry and one additional year of science.

**4** This new curriculum may be helpful for a student who plans to go on to college, but it seems excessive for vocational students.

**5** Plumbers, mechanics, construction workers, hairdressers and many other positions do not need an advanced math and science background. Math needed for vocational jobs could be learned through an “applied math” class, or on-site learning.

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

How does Mr. Thomas’s diction compare to Mr. O’Connell’s diction? Given the importance of establishing credibility, which writer’s diction best serves that goal?

