

Math 101 Finite Mathematics: Voting Methods Op-Ed Article

Due in class Friday, Sept. 19.

Probably the most important thing to take away from Chapter 1 is that the plurality voting method is terrible, mathematically speaking, because it throws away all information about a voter's choices except for her first choice. But that's the method that's generally used in the United States. Why? *Why?* **Why?** It's upsetting. Part of the answer may be that most people aren't even aware that there's a problem, or that there are other options. So your assignment is to write 750-word opinion article for a newspaper, explaining the issue to the public and proposing a solution.

Some guidelines from the University Relations Office at Michigan State

(http://www2.ur.msu.edu/site/resources/op_ed/):

Op-eds get their names from their placement in the newspaper; they are opinion pieces written by members of the public that typically are published on the page opposite of the newspaper's editorial page. Newspapers, magazines, and other news publications regularly run op-eds to ensure that they present a diversity of opinions on topics of importance to their readers. Since they are longer than letters to the editor, they offer an opportunity for a better-developed argument.

Good op-eds require:

- Strong opinions, articulately stated.
- Timely topics. News gets stale quickly; so don't give opinions if they're simply a rehashing of what already has been said.
- Expertise. Write about a subject based on a particular expertise, either because of a scholarly background or personal experience.
- Focus. Choose a topic and stick to it, rather than diluting one's own argument by simultaneously tackling more than one subject.
- A call to action. This requires that the arguments outlined in the op-ed come to a logical conclusion – and that a solution is presented. Do not simply outline a problem.

General writing tips for op-eds:

- Summarize the thesis quickly. Caution should be taken in not using too many words to “set up” the argument. Enough space should be reserved to provide evidence or examples to back up the thesis.
- Connect the topic to the readership of the publication. Writing about war in the Middle East for submission to the local daily? Tell local readers why they should pay attention. Focusing on a local issue but submitting to a national publication? Be sure to show why the issue has broad appeal.
- Consider using a short list – “Here are three reasons the proposal should be defeated” or “Here are four possible solutions that won't cost the taxpayers a nickel” – to help articulate the major points in a way that is accessible to the readers.
- Write with the readers in mind. Tailor the style – academic, breezy, thoughtful, humorous – to the publication's audience.
- Back up the arguments with facts – and be sure to confirm those facts before they are used. Don't use footnotes, but attribute figures to their sources when using them: “Figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that . . .” or “Data from the 2000 Census clearly show that . . .”
- Convictions should be firm. If the author is refuting arguments from an opposing side that are common knowledge, be sure to use more space arguing the point than articulating those held by others.
- Be precise in grammar, spelling, sentence construction, and other essentials of composition. Lack of attention to these aspects of the work reflects poorly on the author as a legitimate source of information.