**Definition of Editorial**

An Editorial, by way of definition, is a corporate voice or position of a media organization on any given issue of public interest. The editorial is also known as the leader. The two synonymous terms according to Duyile (2005) are the “opinion of the newspaper simply written for the understanding of readers, leading them to take decisions on the issues being discussed”.

Throwing more light on the issue of editorial or leader, the veteran journalist describes it as the explanatory texts, the opinions of the newspaper on any topic. Duyile (2005) defines editorial as a “comment or an argument in support of a particular policy, an action, or an idea whether expressed or latent. It can be an argument exhibiting the logical reasoning of the newspaper using the thoughts of the proprietor for the purpose of persuading the readers (audience) to kick against an idea, policy or an action based on facts available.”

Okoro, N and B Agbo (2003) considered editorial as “a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader.”

Hoffman, M (2007) defines editorial as a “statement of opinion from an editor or publisher about you and your business. Media coverage generated by news staff”.

In harmony with the above, Iyorkyaa (1996) defined an editorial as “a journalistic essay which attempts to:

a. inform or explain;

b. persuade or convince;

c. stimulate insight in an entertaining or humorous manner.”

Spencer, M in Iyorkyaa (1996) viewed the subject matter as “a presentation of facts and opinion in concise, logical, pleasing order for the sake of entertaining or interpreting significant news in such a way that its importance to the average reader will be clear.”

From the definitions so far examined, it is clear that an editorial is based on expression or corporate opinion. It interprets issues from a deeper perspective and entertains the average reader with its substance and depth of analysis.

The opinion function of the mass media has made editorial writing a celebrated concept for serious-minded newspapers just as news commentary is to broadcast media.

The posture of an editorial is influenced by the policy and philosophy of the newspaper, ownership structure and the political environment in which the newspaper is operating.

**History of Editorial**

The origin of editorial can be traced as far back as 1830. (Yaasa, 1996), this was the period in which the term editorial was used as a label to designate a statement of the editor’s opinion. The word editorial was used then to refer to an article written by the editor. However, in 20th century, the coast of editorial became enlarged. This was so, because around this period, Newspaper across the world had designated a separate editorial page for editorials and letters to the editor. Also around this period, some newspapers started placing editorial in a left hand page, usually in front of the section.

It is inspiring to note that modern newspapers have expanded, dignified and enriched the editorial page to the extent that it is been used to face lengthier opinions by columnists and guest writers. This trademark is known as *op-ed*, meaning opposite the editorial page.

**Features of an Editorial**

It is an established fact that virtually all editorial materials have news nuances. According to Ate (2006), an editorial topic or subject cannot emerge from the blues. It must be a topical issue that has been reported in the mass media (print and electronic) either by way of hard news or features. Such an issue must attract public attention and debate.

It is therefore correct to say that an editorial comprises of news and features elements. Ukonu (2005) described editorial as the melting pot for all kinds of journalistic writings. According to him investigative, interpretative and hard news reporting are incorporated into editorials. Objectivity, precision, specialism and advocacy are also styles adopted in treating editorial topics.

An editorial also has some features of a story because of its subjectivity posture. In some cases, thought-provoking letters to the editor are often used to gauge public opinion. When critically exploited, letters to the editor could serve as useful raw materials in writing an editorial. This is because letters to the editor can give some useful insights into emerging controversial and topical issues of public significance (Ate, 2006).

Because of the melting pot posture of an editorial, it can be argued that its components are drawn from the components of other journalistic write-ups.

**Qualities of a Good Editorial**

Every editorial writer must know the general hints guiding the concept of editorial writing. Some of these hints are:

1) An editorial must carry an institutional flavor. The media establishment should be heard “speaking” in an editorial and not an individual business.

2) The language of the editorial should be plain and unambiguous. Whether the purpose of an editorial is to influence the audience, educate or entertain them, the language must be understood by the target audience. If not, the mission of an editorial will not be accomplished.

3) In writing an editorial, the editorialist should always be exact. Say what you want to say without beating about the bush. There should be no room for verbosity and circumlocution.

4) An editorial must be rich in human interest. This is because people are interested in the affairs of their fellow human beings

5) An editorial or leader must be catchy and attention arresting. Dull and weak editorials cannot create the desired effects on its target audience. Persuasive techniques and other appeals can be used for this purpose.

6) Every editorial must be original in tone and substance. A newspaper house should not go and dub another paper’s editorial in the name of being trendy.

7) An editorial must be well researched. Newspapers should factor timeliness or recency into qualitative and quantitative research if an editorial master piece is to be produced.

8) Editorials must be based on concrete facts, not speculations. An editorial writer who knows his/her opinions must endeavor to cross check his/her facts so as to ensure high credibility of the editorial.

**Types of Editorial**

Editorial Writing, a concept that deals with case making has different approaches and types. This unit examines the various types of editorials.

Basically, there are three types of editorials namely:

i. Interpretative Editorials

ii. Controversial Editorials

iii. Explanatory Editorials.

* **Interpretative Editorial**

These kinds of editorials are chiefly written with a major mission to explain issues at stake by placing facts and figures at the door post of readers for proper illumination of the day’s intelligence.

Interpretative editorials could be positive, negative or even neutral in approach or posture depending on the circumstances and the treatment of the subject matter by the editorial writers.

* **Controversial Editorials**

These kinds of editorials are packaged with the particular mission or mandate to propagate a particular or specific point of view.

Controversial editorials’ stock in trade is to convince the reader on the desirability or inevitability of a particular issue while presenting or painting the opposite side in bad light. These kinds of editorials have no place for neutrality and can vehemently oppose a cause or out rightly support it.

* **Explanatory Editorials**

Explanatory Editorials only present the vexing issues of the day for the judgment of the reader. These kinds of editorials only open-up thought provoking issues of socio-political and economic interest for the attention of the readers and allow them to judge. Such editorials identify a problem, explain it and allow the reader to find solution to it.

In an era when problem solving is the in-thing, explanatory editorials are seen by most media experts as no editorials because they only photocopy problems as they appear and leave the entire headache to the reader. These kinds of editorials are gradually fading out of the mass media because of their structural deficiency of non-proffering of solutions to identified problems. (Ate, 2006).

It is crucial to point out at this juncture that some people view types of editorials from the perspective of the functions editorial performs.

Viewed from that angle, we have editorials that attack, editorials that defend and editorials that support issues. We also have editorials that amuse or amaze the audience among other types.

**Study of Editorial Pages of Leading National Dailies**

* **Columns:**

A regular or recurring opinion or commentary by a particular author.

They are referred to as “columns” because they usually fit a specified space or length. They usually have a theme – sports, entertainment, gossip, politics, gardening and so on. Almost always run with a photo of the author; uses the “I”. Columns are named columns because of the shape they take. The paper does not claim ownership of the opinion.

* **Editorials**: usually unsigned opinions representing the views of a particular publication editorial board or organization’s leadership. It never has a name attached and always written with “we” pronouns
* **Opinions**: Stand-alone opinions by one author at one time

Purpose of Opinions:

* **Editorial Cartoons**

They give a visual opinion, usually exaggerates the subject to prove a point.

* **Reviews**

Reviews present one person’s opinion on a specific work. They can review, a movie, CD, play, concert, book, and so on.

* **Letters to the Editor**

Anyone can write in any opinion they have. They usually address some issue the newspaper/magazine raised in a previous publication. This is what makes a publication a public forum.

**Structure of Editorial**

Editorials are written according to a well-established general formula.

* Introduction - state the problem
* Body - expresses an opinion
* Solution - offers a solution to the problem
* Conclusion - emphasizes the main issue

Introduction, body and conclusion are exactly like other news stories. Then there is an objective explanation of the issue, especially complex issues and a timely news angle. Opinions from the opposing viewpoint that refute directly the same issues the writer addresses are also included. The opinions of the writer are delivered in a professional manner. Good editorials engage issues, not personalities and refrain from name-calling or other petty tactics of persuasion. Anyone can gripe about a problem, but a good editorial should take a pro-active approach to making the situation better by using constructive criticism and giving solutions with a solid and concise conclusion that powerfully summarizes the writer's opinion with some punch.

**Lead with an Objective Explanation of the Issue/Controversy.**  
  
Include the five W's and the H.

Pull in facts and quotations from the sources which are relevant.

Additional research may be necessary.

**Present Your Opposition First.**  
  
As the writer you disagree with these viewpoints. Identify the people (specifically who oppose you.

Use facts and quotations to state objectively their opinions.

Give a strong position of the opposition. You gain nothing in refuting a weak position.

**Directly Refute The Opposition's Beliefs.**

You can begin your article with transition.

Pull in other facts and quotations from people who support your position.

Concede a valid point of the opposition which will make you appear rational, one who has considered all the options.

**Give Other, Original Reasons/Analogies**

In defense of your position, give reasons from strong to strongest order.

Use a literary or cultural allusion that lends to your credibility and perceived intelligence.

**V. Conclude With Some Punch.**

Give solutions to the problem or challenge the reader to be informed.

A quotation can be effective, especially if from a respected source

A rhetorical question can be an effective concluder as well.

**Determinants of Editorial Subject**

Writing an editorial piece is not a tea party. It is not a venture that would thrive in an environment of gossip and rumor mongering. Ate (2006) provides a catalogue of factors that determine editorial subjects. These factors are:

**1) Ensure that the topic is relevant and timely:** In order to achieve this, the editorialist must factor into a consideration of the way and manner people converse with one another. In every society, people converse basically in three ways:

(a) People talk about people

(b) People talk about things/events

(c) People talk ideas.

Editorials that focus on people discussing people are likely going to be pedestrian in approach and may invoke the temptation of using fowl or abusive language. Such editorials are hardly profound as they provide avenues for character assassination rather than opportunities for robust societal thinking.

Editorials that deal with people discussing things or events are a little bit advanced and more acceptable than the first – people talking about people. However, these editorials cannot stand erect in the market place of ideas because they lack the fundamental oxygen that shapes public opinion or enliven public discourse.

The best kinds of editorial are those whose platforms are erected on ideas. Ideas are vehicles that drive or move the society forward. Therefore, ideas oriented or anointed editorials are the most profound and celebrated ones.

**2) The topic chosen might be local but the treatment should not be Parochial**: In writing an editorial masterpiece, a local, conservative and unusual topic could be raised but its treatment should be sound and logical.

The writer should be able to bring out issues from the local event that are of national or international significance. For instance, in 2005, there was an editorial in *The Guardian,* about the extinction of wild animals in the University of Ibadan (U.I) zoo. Naturally, the topic was local but its treatment was superb.

The piece traced the history of the U.I Zoo as one of the first generation zoos in the country and remembered with pains how the zoo used to attract local and international tourists during its good days.

The editorial blamed the ugly development on the nation’s leadership and society and wondered why a society that is unable to meet people’s yearnings would be friendly to animals.

The editorial called for urgent steps from stakeholders to redress the injustice against the animal kingdom and warned that nature and posterity would judge our generation for its hostility against wild and special species of animals.

**3) Editorial topic should be drawn from socio-political and economic Issues:** The above would enable the editorialist to juxtapose thorough background of the event with clear illumination of the day’s intelligence for the enrichment of public opinion, forecast the probable outcome of some issues and pass a moral judgment on same.

**4) Topics could be borne out of the desire to amaze or amuse:** There is no gainsaying the fact editorial writing is a serious-minded affair. However, it is not all the times that the writer would feed the audience with serious-minded stuff. There are some situations where an editorial topic could be given light treatment to entertain the audience while feeding them with concrete facts. This is done to ease their tension and dilute the stress that usually goes with analysis of burning issues.

**Editorial Writing Techniques**

**Prewriting: Planning what to write**

* **Choose a topic.** You can choose to tackle any of the issues, events, faces appearing in the news but try as much as possible to make the editorial acquire the following values:

Current and timely

Substantive

Offers insight

Free of conflict of interest

* **Obtain background material and information** about your topic. Observe, read, interview.
* **Identify your purpose and audience** – will it merely inform? Or do you want to interpret, criticize, and suggest reforms, urge readers to action?
* **Brainstorm Ideas**

Finding ideas: Ideas can be found via free writings, Reading, journal writing.

* **Organize Information** – briefly outline your facts logically before writing the piece.

Choosing details

Ordering details

**Writing the first draft**

Editorials usually have three parts:

The beginning

The body and

The conclusion

**The Beginning: Editorial Lead**

* The editorial lead, like in the news story, is the showcase of the write-up. However, it is not considered the heart of the story unlike in the news.
* The heart could be in the middle or at the end, depending upon the whims and style of the editorial writer.
* Remember that it must contain enough “sparks” to urge the readers to read the whole article. A flat, dull and dragging lead will readily turn readers away.
* It does not have to follow the traditional five W’s and one H.
* The editorial writer has more freedom to display his creativity than the news writer in the writing of the lead.

Editorial writer can write the lead of following types:

* **Emphatic (forceful Declaration) statement or maxim**

Like “The law mght be harsh, but it is the law.”

ANY way you look at it, Balochistan is in dire straits.

* **A striking statement about the topic.**

Patriot, orator, lawyer, martyr – that was Iqbal Haider

* **A quotation**

“Time is gold,” so the saying goes.

“Education is the best provision for old age.” Such were the words of Greek Philosopher Aristotle.

* **Narration**

October saw a long and heated debate in the Constitutional Assembly Hall which resulted in the passing of a resolution amending the Contempt of Court Law.

* **An order**

Go out and vote.

* **A question**

**IT seems to be a case of ‘who do they think they’re fooling?’ The investigation into the causes that led an Airblue plane to crash two years ago, dragged on for long.**

**EVEN as the ruling party tries to make what political capital it can out of the Asghar Khan case, it will probably not be able to sweep under the carpet the real question: who will punish the generals?**

* **Poetic**

In the darks depths of man’s labyrinth of fears may lie hidden a ray of hope which man, in his despair over other problems, may have overlooked.

* **Prophecy**

If nothing is done, we will wake up one day to find that there are not enough schools for our children.

* **Reaction**

Never has the government been so concerned with development projects as it is now.

THE end of the so-called Swiss letter saga has come in the softest possible way.

ALMOST two months after the government blocked YouTube, the video-sharing site remains inaccessible to Pakistanis.

* **Mixture of facts and opinion**

It is encouraging to note that students would rather take active part in politics than remain onlookers.

THE prolonged standoff between the Punjab government and the young doctors could finally be over.

**MANY parts of the country remain on edge as Muharram approaches. In Karachi, several people — both Shia and Sunni activists — have been murdered in the past week in a renewed wave of sectarian killings.**

**A news peg**

IT has been indicated by officials that 7,000 Taliban operatives may have infiltrated Karachi.

A US appeals court has upheld the September 2010 verdict that sentenced Aafia Siddiqui to 86 years in prison.

The exact type of lead to use depends upon the nature and purpose of the editorial. Usually it is best to state briefly the situation that stimulates the editorial

**The Body**

The body should include the editorial’s basic facts, the causes and effects behind incidents, situations, illustrations and arguments.

**Writing the BODY**

When writing the body, remember to:

* Keep an eye on the list of points you intend to discuss.
* Write without worrying whether the wording of each sentence is perfect and
* Leave plenty of room for rewriting

**The Conclusion**

The last part drives home the final important thought or direction. This conclusion may be in the form of advice, challenge, command or just a rounding out or a simple summary.

**Writing the CONCLUSION**

* If the editorial must have an impelling lead paragraph, it follows that it must also have a good ending - one that could literally clinch the “ballgame.”
* The writer must remember that the most emphatic positions are the beginning and the end.

Here are some typical last paragraphs:

* **Proverb**

Savage sentences ought to be deplored. But there is only safe rule to follow when travelling abroad. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

* **Quotations**

A book by Dennise and Ching Ping Bloodworth offers us an insight into the ways of statecraft. We think this quotation from the book a timely reminder: “…A country or a party should form a vertical ‘united front’ with enemies who can be liquidated later, in order to be able to destroy the enemy who must be liquidated now.”

* **Advice**

We must always be on the guard against these lawless elements in Karachi.

* **Comparison**

Other countries are able to withstand the American policies. For a few thousand dollars, we are practically selling our integrity and the future generations of Pakistan.

* **Contrast**

Societal reforms cannot, indeed, make headway if more privileges are piled up for a few while the great majority of the population becomes mere onlookers.

* **Crusading**

Get out and vote!

* **Argumentative**

We therefore urge the police, the local governments, the BAI, and the courts to crack down hard on dog thieves. In the old American West, horse thieves are lynched. We are not advocating the same punishment for dog thieves but they should be treated as criminals, not as mere pranksters. If we don’t, our moral values will certainly go to the dogs.

* **Formal and the standard form**

We hope it is not too late. It is about time the proper steps are taken.

* **Conclusion**

With these improvement programs, the people of Karachi and suburbs are assured of good water supply and efficient service.

**After writing the draft:**

* Revise your work.
* Add action and clarity to writing
* Reread your draft carefully
* Focus sentences through parallelism and translation
* Rethink, reevaluate and rewrite
* Use transitions
* Move sentences
* Add words and phrases

**Proofreading and Editing**

* Concentrate on surface features of your writing
* Check for clarity
* Check for errors in grammar, punctuation, mechanics and spelling