

Sociology 418/818
Social Inequalities in Health
Response Memo #5
Due April 30, 2019

The purpose of this assignment is to write an op-ed on a topic related to health disparities. Op-eds are typically 750-800 words, and have a clear thesis, support for the thesis, and recommendations about solutions for the problem or topic identified. The intended audience is an educated generalist audience, who may have only cursory knowledge of health disparities. The factual claims or points of evidence you use to support your case should not include in-text references (e.g., Smith 2019) but instead include embedded links that bring readers to source materials. For examples, see:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/opinion/depressed-but-not-ashamed.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/opinion/sunday/suicide-rate-existential-crisis.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/well/live/when-doctors-downplay-womens-health-concerns.html>

The following details will help you understand the scope and structure of op-ed writing projects.

Purpose:

Op-eds allow experts to communicate to a broad audience, with the intention of making a strong claim or suggestion. While they are commonly published in newspapers and online sources, they have the added benefit of reaching your stakeholders, such as policy makers, by directing attention to an issue important to you. Thus, op-eds can be an important platform for using your education to address the systems of health inequality that we have discussed in our class.

Structure:

You will compose a formal op-ed in response to *an issue that you care about*, that pertains to one of the health disparities that we have discussed this semester in class, or that you are exploring in your final course paper.

Some questions that are useful to ask yourself when getting started include:

- * What specific issue or controversy are you responding to?
- * Why is it important to consider this issue now?
- * What evidence/insight can you offer in support of your position(s)?
- * What is problematic about the claim and/or the evidence that other author(s) used?
- * What *additional* evidence or insight do you have that could shed new light onto the matter at hand?

Format:

Op-ed pieces run approximately 750-800 words. Please adhere to this convention— overly lengthy op-eds will lose your readers' interest! Writing less means you must be very precise.

Your language should be professional and polished, and free of grammatical and syntax errors. For helpful (and amusing) advice, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/tips-for-aspiring-op-ed-writers.html>. A general format is:

1. An engaging title
2. Your by-line (Name)
3. Opening paragraph is typically an engaging statement or anecdote to draw in reader, and a statement of the purpose of your essay.
4. The next 3-5 paragraphs provide evidence in support of your thesis. In some cases, this may be evidence challenging the position you are arguing against. The evidence may be statistics, examples from other countries, personal experience/observation, or (in rare instances) a highly compelling anecdote.
5. The concluding 2-4 paragraphs will suggest a concrete plan of action for addressing the issue raised in your op-ed. It can be support for a public policy currently being debated in Congress, a new policy to be implemented at BU, a cultural or social change you would like to see implemented, or even a change of corporate policies. The most important thing is that you have considered both the benefits and costs of this recommended course of action, and that you persuade readers that the benefits will indeed outweigh the costs.
6. At the end of your essay, you will include a brief (1-2 sentence) biographical description that conveys your expertise on the essay's topic.