

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

Letters, Questions and Answers

Local Blog Network
washingtonpost.com/blogs/

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
letters@washpost.com

Rage before reality on the debt

Let's see now: In a single column ["Congress stands its ground," op-ed, July 26], George F. Will accused President Obama of "vanity and naivete" "inordinate self-regard" and "mendacity," and scribed him as "a rogue" and "hi-

On the web

Do squirrels get on Twitter? Well, this one does.

Tweeting from the trees

LOCAL OPINIONS

At Pepco, we're working hard to in

@ “

Today on

POSTLOCAL.COM

Public safety
Read the latest police and courthouse news and

Gossip gab
Share local celebrity si

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I Supposed
To Know?

25 Youth
Curfew
Debate

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

A Word About The Citizen's Voice

The first issue of *The Washington Post* on December 6, 1877, contained four pages, cost three cents, and had a circulation of 10,000. In *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years*, Chalmers Roberts writes:

A week after the paper began THE POST ran a letter to the editor complaining that the newsboys were asking five cents. "It is worth five but the newsboy who charges that for it is a swindler," the paper replied. "He makes a fair profit at three cents, and purchasers should insist on having it at that price." (1977, page 10)

The Post was continuing a tradition of American journalism — letters to the editor — giving citizens a voice. News and commentary often were presented as letters in the earliest newspapers. Government and English students have read "Cato's Letters" or "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," which were widely reprinted in early American newspapers. During the 19th century, letters to the editor were increasingly grouped near the editorials of newspapers, so the op-ed, opposite the editorials, page began.

Teachers are encouraged to use the resources of this guide to introduce students to letters to the editor. Purposes of this forum for public discourse, guidelines for submission and examples are included to help teachers develop letter writers. Two *Post* articles and the letters that responded to the coverage illustrate the potential for giving balance to reporting, adding depth to public dialogue, and allowing the right of reply.

Citizens from all walks of life, races, creeds, socioeconomic backgrounds and ages can write a letter and respond to coverage, and perhaps, even change events. Students can have an impact: Sixth graders at Shepherd Elementary started a letter campaign to get the statue of Boss Shepherd moved from Blue Plains to the downtown area and a high school student in Fairfax began an exchange of letters to the editor that debated the benefits of saving planetariums in the County schools.

The Washington Post provides many opportunities for its readers to interact with its staff. Check them out — and write.

Lessons: Media is a public forum for an exchange of ideas. Students employ their skills of comprehension, analysis, comparison, synthesis, and persuasion through reading and writing letters to the editor.

Level: Low to High

Subjects: English, Journalism, Government

Related Activity: All Other Disciplines

NIE Online Guide

Editor — Carol Lange
Art Editor — Carol Porter

Available Online

All Washington Post NIE guides may be downloaded at www.washpost.com/nie.

Send comments about this guide to:

Margaret Kaplow, Educational Services Manager, kaplowsm@washpost.com

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

The Citizen's Voice: Letters, Questions and Answers

Letters to the editor provide a quick and effective forum for citizens to express their views. An important element of the op-ed page, letters create a dialogue with the newspaper's present editors, writers and other readers. They may also be used to understand attitudes of the past.

Do a Crossword Puzzle

English, Journalism

Answers to the crossword puzzle (page 15 of this guide) are found at the end of these suggested activities.

The answers to the crossword puzzle include many terms related to writing letters. After students have completed the puzzle, they could use these terms to write about some aspect of the art of letter writing or the purpose of letters to the editor.

Study Vocabulary

English, Social Studies

"In the Know" sidebar, the crossword puzzle and articles are sources of vocabulary. Review the definitions, distinguish usage of the words, and encourage students to use them in their own communication.

Discuss Community Discourse and Dialogue

All Disciplines

Discuss with students what it means to voice one's opinions. What do the terms "discourse" and "dialogue" mean? Both involve communication. "Discourse" implies a more formal, orderly and authoritative communication. "Dialogue" is more conversational, an exchange of ideas.

Discussion could include the following:

- What has been the role of public discourse throughout American history?
- What role has the newspaper played in generating dialogue on issues and informing the public?
- Review some letters to the editor written by public officials. How do they differ from speeches made by

the officials?

- In what ways has online publication expanded the newspaper's role in community discourse?
- What role has social media played in communicating ideas, events and actions?

Letters to the editor provide citizens with a means to communicate their concerns, their different perspectives and their praise. Citizens engage in dialogue, especially with the online "comments," a forum allowing dialogue to continue and expand.

Locate Places to Ask Questions

All Disciplines

The newspaper is a source of answers to questions. Some of the questions are posed internally by editors and reporters who are reporting the news — the answers to the 5 Ws and H — and writing features or responding to human interest.

There are also places where readers send in their questions to be answered. These may be technical — in the areas of technology, business and science. The questions may be practical — seeking traffic, dining or automotive information. The questions may also be personal — seeking relations, religion and health advice.

Give students the e-Replica assignment, "Citizen Voices." This activity is designed for students to use the search feature of the e-Replica edition to locate places in the sections of *The Post* 1) to get their questions answered and 2) to express their opinions.

In the Know

Billet: Written order directing that a member of a military force be provided with board and lodging

Communication: Verbal or written exchange of information or news

Correspond: Write

Correspondence: Communication through letters

Correspondent: Letter writer; journalist covering foreign lands

Discourse: Formal, orderly and authoritative communication

Dispatch: Message sent with speed, especially an important official message sent by a diplomatic, military or naval officer; a news item filed by a correspondent

Epistle: A letter, especially a formal one

Fan letter: Personal letter written to an admired person

Lettre de creance: Letter of credit

Lettres de cachet: Secret letters; sealed by a royal cachet, containing orders for arrest and punishment without trial

Man of letters: Scholar

Message: Short communication transmitted by words, signals, or other means from one person, station or group to another

Missive: A letter, especially a long or official one

Postcard: Card for sending a message by mail without an envelope

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How did students use the e-Replica search feature to locate these opportunities? What search terms did they use? Use this activity to hone students' technology skills.

 Teachers who are receiving class sets of the Sunday *Washington Post*, use the lower half of this assignment sheet with the print edition. Afterwards have students compare and contrast the benefits of using the digital search feature to the turning of inked pages.

Locate Places to Voice Your Views

All Disciplines

The *Washington Post* has many outlets in print and online for citizens to voice their views. Give students "Let Your Views Be Known." This extensive listing displays the diversity of options for readers to interact with *Washington Post* staff members.

Ask students to locate five or more *Post* personnel with whom they might correspond. You may give students "Let Your Views Be Known"; students will still need to locate the section of the newspaper in which these columns are found. Or let students search on their own first. If you do the latter, the class might compile their own list of *Post* staff with whom they might correspond. Compare their list with those found in "Let Your Views Be Known."

After reading one to two weeks of the work of a selected *Post* staff member or reading examples of a particular column over a month, students could write a letter to a *Washington Post* staff member. They will have a clearer idea of the beat, the topics and/or the kinds of answers given by their chosen writer. As students receive responses, post these on a board for sharing.

Get the INSIDE Scoop *Journalism, English, All Disciplines*

A tradition that went back to the trial against John Peter Zenger in 1735 considered anonymous letters part of the right to free speech and press.

Into the 1960s this practice began to change. Editors wanted more transparency and for the writers to be more responsible for what was published.

By 2000 nearly all newspapers rejected anonymous letters to the editor. Writers were confirmed and readers knew the identity — and agenda — of the writers.

"Letters to the Editor: *The Washington Post Policy*" states *The Post's* guidelines for submission. Teachers are also provided questions to verify students' comprehension of the policy.

Teachers and their students learn about the process from selection to publication of a letter to the editor in "How to be a man, or woman, of letters" by former *Post* ombudsman Andrew Alexander. Read the column.

"INSIDER: How to Get Your Letters Published" accompanies the column. The questions cover content, vocabulary and purpose of Alexander's column.

Get Your Letters to the Editor Published *All Disciplines*

Even though composition is usually considered the domain of the English class, all disciplines have areas that deserve a letter to the editor. For example, *The Post's* Sports section has covered the types of helmets worn and concussions related to high school football and Health coverage has included a number of childhood

Purposes of Letters to the Editor

- Agree with coverage
- Answer allegations
- Begin a dialogue
- Chastise for lack of coverage
- Communicate with others
- Correct grammar and usage
- Disagree with information
- Encourage involvement
- Explain an action
- Express appreciation
- Note an overlooked person or event
- Offer a solution
- Point out an error
- Praise actions or individuals
- Provide a different point of view
- Question an idea expressed
- Raise an issue
- Relate a concern
- Respond to criticism
- Seek advice

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Injuries. Students can relate and respond to these topics.

The skill of writing persuasively is contained in academic content standards. Newspapers provide some of the best contemporary models for persuasive writing in the editorials and letters to the editor.

Having read published letters to the editor and the guidelines for submission, students should be ready to decide on a topic that concerns them. Be sure that students do research that is necessary to be accurate. Letter writing is also an exercise in brevity and clarity of expression.

Prepare to Write

All Disciplines

Read "Montgomery curfew debate intensifies" or another youth-oriented news article. Use it to practice the process that leads to writing a letter to the editor.

Discuss the news elements of the story. Is the story balanced? For example, have all involved parties been quoted or had their points of view presented fairly? What do students think of the proposed curfew?

Have students draft a letter to the editor.

Have students review their letters:

- Reaction and opinion are starting points for a letter of response.
- Have the letters only emotions?
- What facts or sources might be quoted to add reason and depth to their letters?
- Could a well-chosen word replace a phrase?
- Is the order logical?
- Is the point of view clear?
- Have the guidelines for submission been followed?

In addition to the news article of September 1, 2011, this guide has

reprinted "A cop on curfews: How we spot the good kids." This is the letter to the editor written by Robert Carter, a deputy commander for the Silver Spring District who was quoted by Petula Dvorak in her July 29 column on the proposed curfew in Montgomery County, Md.

Read and discuss Carter's perspective. His letter to the editor illustrates a response to a columnist's point of view. It is also an example of a journalistic principle: An individual who is covered has the right to reply. This brings balance and fairness to coverage.

Read About Colombia

Government, Journalism, South American History

Students should locate Colombia on a map and share what they know of this South American country. Do any of the students in the class have relatives or acquaintances who live in Colombia?

Teachers may wish to explain the American diplomatic policy of providing aid to other countries. To whom is this aid provided? For what reasons is aid given?

Vocabulary that may be reviewed before reading the article includes "terrorist," "counterinsurgency," "Marxist," "egregious," "scrutiny," "insurgents," and "dossiers."

Read "A case of aid gone bad in Colombia" in sections. What information is given by the reporters in the first two paragraphs? What contrast is given in the sentence that begins "But new revelations"?

Complete reading the first section. What evidence is provided for Colombia being "Washington's closest friend in Latin America"? What new information is given to counter this relationship?

Read the Resources and guidance

Resources

www.concernedjournalists.org/how-write-letter-editor

How to Write a Letter To The Editor

The Committee of Concerned Journalists provides a straightforward explanation of letters to the editor and samples.

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/edit/letters/letterform.htm

Letters to the Editor

The Washington Post guidelines

<http://ajhaonline.org/>

American Journalism Historians Association

Site includes abstracts of past issues and index

www.ncew.org

National Conference of Editorial Writers

Professional organization for editorial and opinion writers

www.lexicon.net/~lis01101/Pages/WRIT.LET.HTM

Points on How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Guidelines for direct communication

www.creators.com/opinion/authors.html

Creators.Com

Read sample opinion pieces written by authors in the syndicate file. These might be used as stimulus for students to write a letter to the author.

Casey, Maura and Barbara M. Drake, eds. *Beyond Argument: A Handbook for Opinion Writers and Editors*

National Conference of Editorial Writers "Best practices" handbook to help professionals hone their skills and to offer newcomers an inside look at the profession of opinion writing; second edition

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section. List the following on the board: William Romero, National and International Observations Group, Group to Analyze Terrorist Organization Media, U.S. agencies, William Brownfield. As the section is read, have students record what is stated by and about each.

Read the last section, Years of trouble. Who has been interviewed in this section of the article? What new information is provided?

This story has not concluded. There will be follow-up stories. If students could interview additional sources for this story, who would they interview? What else would they like to know?

Read a Response

History, Journalism

Teachers may review the following vocabulary before giving “Colombia’s fight against terrorism” to students: “failed state,” “reckless distortions,” “kingpins,” “extradite,” “obstruct,” and “transparency.”

Someone who figures prominently in “A case of aid gone bad in Colombia,” is former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe.

Is he quoted in the news story? How is he portrayed by the authors?

“Colombia’s fight against terrorism” is a letter to the editor. Who is the author?

Explain to students that a principle of journalism in America is the right of reply. If a reporter is critical of a person, the media should give that individual an opportunity to know the allegations or criticism and to respond to them.

- Would students agree with Uribe’s summary of *The Post*’s article?
- What is the point of view of Avaro Uribe? Does he provide

facts and specific information to support his position?

- Do students believe he has made a strong case for his perspective in this reply to *The Post*’s front page story?

Express Your Dreams

Language Arts, English

Read the KidsPost article, “What is your dream?” Show students a picture of the latest memorial to be added to the National Mall. Tell students about Martin Luther King Jr.’s life, ideas and “I Have a Dream” speech. Resources include the Martin Luther King Jr. Center (www.thekingcenter.org/).

When the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the National Mall was being dedicated and opened to the public in August 2011, KidsPost asked its readers to share their dreams for changing the world. Ask students to write an essay on the topic. Refer to the article for submission guidelines.

Search the Voice of the People

Social Studies, Journalism, English

Conduct an Internet search of “Letters to the Editor.” Assign pairs or groups of students to read the letters to the editor of different news sources. Be sure to include newspapers from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Northwest, West Coast and Southwest. Compare and contrast the topics that are presented.

Students might be asked to read for the following:

- How often do writers refer to the media’s coverage?
- To what extent do the writers of the letters represent a diversity of ages, neighborhoods, economic situations and political views?

Columbia

www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm

Background Note: Colombia

U.S. Dept of State country file includes history and current situation

www.colombia.travel/en/

Colombia

Official travel guide for the country of Colombia

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html

CIA: The World FactBook

Topics include geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, military and transnational issues

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frc/cs/cotoc.html>

A Country Study: Colombia

Library of Congress background on Colombia: profile, history, environment, economy, government and national security

<http://bogota.usembassy.gov/>

Embassy of the United States: Bogota•Columbia

Site includes bilateral topics, news and events

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/americas/southamerica/colombia/

World: Columbia

The Washington Post coverage of Columbia

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/colombia/>

LANIC

Latin American Network Information Center provides links to academic, arts, government, indigenous peoples, sports and other categories

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- How localized are the concerns expressed?
- In what ways do the letters reflect the writer's agenda vs. a community concern?
- In what ways do the letters reflect the geographic area?

After the students have read the letters and compiled their findings, have them discuss what conclusions they have about the concerns of the readers of that newspaper's circulation area. The pairs/groups could write a summary and be ready to present it to the class.

Take a Look at History

History, Social Studies, Media Arts, All Disciplines

What do letters to the editor reveal about generational changes in attitudes? Students could be grouped by decade (1950s, 1960s to present) or by topic (medicine, war, technology) to examine reactions and attitudes expressed in older letters to the editor.

"Then and Now — News and Citizens' Reaction" provides topics for a more in-depth look at America's changing attitudes. Possible questions for consideration are included under each topic. Use *The Washington Post* archives and other databases available through your school to locate letters to the editor.

The newspaper is the first draft of history. Applying this premise, students will be history detectives. They will be honing their research skills to find the earliest coverage, public reaction and society's initial response.

Some of the questions that students will be answering include:

- When was initial coverage of the topic?
- How much initial coverage did the media give the topic?
- Who were the significant parties involved?
- What attitudes were expressed by those who were interviewed? In letters to the editor?
- In what ways has coverage of the topic continued? Expanded? Decreased? Changed?

For each of the topics in "Then and Now" there are parallel issues today. What are readers expressing about these themes in their letters to the editor?

Another extension of the research would ask students to pick an issue or an event, a political or social issue or a contemporary movement in science or the arts, i.e. technology, hip-hop culture, reality TV. Write their own responses in the form of a letter to the editor. ■

ANSWERS.

INSIDER: How to Get Your Letters Published

1. The ombudsman is the independent representative of the readers of *The Washington Post*. He receives the letters of complaint and praise, the concerns over lack of coverage and kind of reporting, the lessons in grammar, usage and societal mores.
- He talks to the staff and gets the inside story to report back in his weekly column.
2. Approximately 4 percent.
3. Online at www.washingtonpost.com.
4. Answers will include: use e-mail in a timely manner, be brief, write well, have something new to say, send on Friday afternoon and live in *The Post's* circulation area.
5. The Letters editor
6. Staff members contact letter writers to confirm authorship and vet for any hidden agendas.
7. All letters are edited; substantive revisions get the approval of the writers. A copy of the letter is shared with *Post* reporters or columnists who are criticized.
8. "Curate" indicates that the selected submissions have been reviewed by knowledgeable individuals for accuracy.
9. Answers will vary.
10. Answers will vary.
11. For more local opinions visit washingtonpost.com/localopinions.
12. After students have written their letters to the editor. The class can role play the role of the Letters editor and the staff member who is vetting the letter. Does the letter meet submission guidelines, have clarity of expression and express an interesting perspective?

ANSWERS. From Letters to Letters



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program



Citizen Voices | Search The Washington Post

The Washington Post provides coverage of local, national and international news. In addition to news articles, features, editorials and opinion pieces written by *The Post* staff, citizens contribute to content. Letters to the Editor, guest commentary and questions are contributed and published in different sections of the print and online editions.

Your Assignment: Where To Get Your Questions Answered and Where to Express Your Opinion

Use e-Replica or print editions of *The Washington Post* to locate places where readers' questions are answered. Also, identify sections of the newspaper where readers' comments are published. For example, in the daily News or A section, you will find Letters to the Editor on the op-ed page. Where are Letters to the Editor located in the Sunday *Washington Post*?

Set up your own paper with the following three-column format and sections of *The Washington Post*.

Daily Washington Post

Ask Questions

Express Ideas

News or A Section
 Metro
 Style
 KidsPost
 Sports
 Business
 Health & Science (Tuesday)
 Food (Wednesday)
 Local Living (Thursday)
 Weekend (Friday)
 Real Estate (Saturday)

Letters to the Editor, op-ed

Sunday Washington Post

Ask Questions

Express Ideas

News or A Section
 Metro
 Outlook
 Arts
 Comics
 KidsPost
 Sunday Style
 Travel
 WP Magazine

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Elements of A Letter To The Editor

1

Think

Writers should know the purpose of the letters they are composing. Before writing the letter, list the main idea they hope to communicate. Ask: How can I best persuade the readers that this is a valid idea?

2

Write

- Writers should include a specific reference to *The Washington Post* news article, commentary or other coverage (headline and date), if applicable.

- Writers should give background information or formal title of events if writing to complain about lack of coverage.

- The writers' points of view should be clearly stated.

- Writers should disclose their position, organizational involvement or other influence on their points of view. This could be age and membership in a school club or team.

Bicycling good and bad

You missed a fabulous opportunity in the Aug. 24 news story "For many, an early but arduous commute home" to talk about how some commuters regularly avoid the mass rush of drivers and Metro riders, which obviously was especially maddening after the previous day's earthquake. You should have at least mentioned those who commute by bicycle. On a gorgeous, late-summer afternoon, I enjoyed a traffic-free, stress-free bike ride home from downtown. So did a lot of other folks who commute on two wheels.

TOM HASER, Annandale

In the Aug. 19 Going Out Q&A, a reader asked the question "How do you guys usually get home after going out? Since driving isn't the best option."

3

Submit

The Washington Post has guidelines for submission of letters to the editor. Read them and follow the submission guidelines.

- The letter does not exceed the word limit.
- The letter has no spelling, grammar or usage errors.
- I have clearly and directly made my point.

I have included:

- My full name. No nicknames
- Home address
- E-mail address
- Day phone number
- Evening phone number

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

What is your dream?



JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Christopher Ogden of Charlotte takes a photo of his children, Courtney, 6, and Conrad, 2, at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. The monument shows a stone of hope cut from a mountain of despair, images drawn from King's "I have a Dream" speech.

Martin Luther King Jr. shared a dream and changed the world. Now it's your turn.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the Mall is open for visitors even though Hurricane Irene forced the cancellation of the official ceremony. Sunday was the 48th anniversary of King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

The memorial to the civil rights leader, set among monuments honoring George

Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, is pretty remarkable for a number of reasons:

- King's granite statue stands 30 feet tall.
- The monument was created from 159 blocks of granite weighing almost 3.6 million pounds.
- It is the only monument on the Mall to an African American.

But as amazing as the monument is, the man it honors was far more remarkable. The message of his life is that one person with a dream really can change the world.

In his famous speech, he said: *"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where*

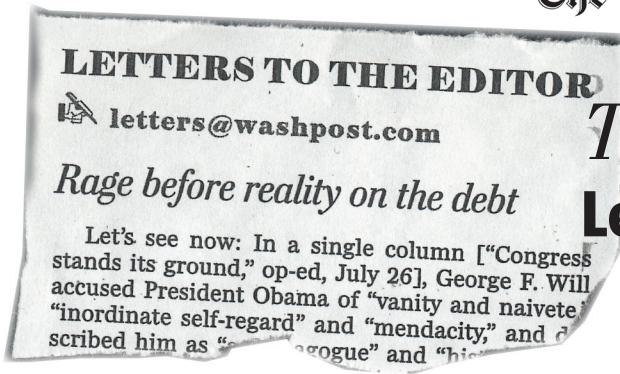
they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

KidsPost wants to know what your dream for changing the world is. Tell us how you would change the world in the spirit of King in 75 words or fewer. Send your essays to kidspost@washpost.com. All entries must include your name, age and home town. Entries must also include a note from a parent granting permission for you to enter. (If a class is submitting, the teacher can provide permission.)

We may publish entries in an upcoming edition of *KidsPost*. If we publish your entry, you will receive a *KidsPost* gift.

kidspost@washpost.com

The Washington Post



The Washington Post Policy Letters to the Editor

Because timeliness is a critical factor in the selection of letters, readers are strongly encouraged to submit their letters by e-mail. The address is *letters@washpost.com*. Do not send attachments; they will not be read. Writers who are unable to use e-mail can send surface mail to the following address:

Letters to the Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street NW
Washington, DC 20071

We appreciate the interest and value the views of all those who take the time to send us their comments. Because of the volume of letters we receive, however, we cannot respond individually to the authors of letters we are unable to use. ■

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the length limit of letters?
2. What does "exclusive to *The Washington Post*" mean?
3. What is the preferred method of submission?
4. If *The Post* accepts your letter for publication, is it likely to be edited or to be published exactly as you submitted it?
5. What is a pseudonym?
6. At one time, newspapers routinely published anonymous letters to the editor. Why do you think contemporary newspapers and online news sources require use of an author's legal name?
7. Locate the LETTERS TO THE EDITOR section of *The Washington Post*. Where is it found in print, in the e-Replica edition and online?
8. Read one day's letters. What topics are covered? How time sensitive are the comments?
9. What information about each author is provided?
10. What do you think is the benefit of publishing Letters to the Editor?

Name _____ Date _____



How to Get Your Letters Published

Read “How to be a man, or woman, of letters,” by former Washington Post ombudsman Andrew Alexander. He provides a behind-the-scenes explanation of the how letters to the editor are selected and prepared for publication.

1. “Ombudsman” is of Scandinavian origin. It literally means “commission man.” Today it means “representative.” What is the role of the ombudsman at *The Washington Post*?
2. What percent of the letters to the editor received yearly on average are published?
3. In addition to the print edition, where may your letters to the editor be published?
4. Give five guidelines for getting your letter to the editor published?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
5. Who selects the letters that are published?
6. In what ways do staff members assist after the letters to be published are selected?
7. What role do editors play before a letter to the editor is published?
8. Editorial Page Editor Fred Hiatt, states that there is a “benefit to having a curated, well-edited, intelligent page of reader’s views.” What does “curate” mean? To what extent do you agree with Hiatt?
9. Read *The Post’s* Free For All page. It is published on Saturday.
 - a. Categorize the topics and intent of the letter writers.
 - b. Select one that appeals to you. What makes the content interesting?
10. Find the editorial page in a print or e-Replica edition. In the lower left locate LOCAL OPINION.
 - a. Who has written the comment?
 - b. What is the tone and idea presented?
11. Where may you go to read other local opinions?
12. Write a letter to the editor on a topic or issue that concerns you. This may be in response to an article you have read or about issues and events that *The Post* did not cover.

Let Your Views Be Known

The Washington Post offers diverse opportunities to comment on issues, to respond to Post print and online content, and to seek answers to your questions. Begin your dialogue with The Washington Post staff and its readers at one of these addresses.

Opportunities appear daily in the print and online sections of The Washington Post. Don't forget you always have the opportunity to write to staff reporters. Locate their e-mail addresses at the end of their articles.

Below the Beltway

It's not every day one may write a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist. E-mail Gene at weingarten@washpost.com to give him your reaction to this week's column or the illustration by Eric Shansby. Because of the volume of e-mail, do not expect Gene Weingarten or other Post reporters to respond to you directly.

The Color of Money

Readers can write to Michelle Singletary, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20071 or e-mail her at singletarym@washpost.com.

Deal Hunter

Know of an upcoming special or sale? Send the information in plenty of time to dealhunter@washpost.com.

Dr. Gridlock

Comments and questions are welcome at drgridlock@washpost.com or write Dr. Gridlock at The Washington Post, 1150 15th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20071.

Faith and Religion

Throughout the week, go to washingtonpost.com/onfaith for updates, discussions, commentary and news about faith and religion. On Faith is a popular online forum. If you have items for the Religion Events listing, e-mail rprvents@washpost.com.

The Fix's Worst Week in Washingt[ao](#)n

If you have a candidate for Worst Week in Washington, e-mail Chris Cillizza at chris.cillizza@washpost.com.

Going Our Way

Interested in having The Post's TRAVEL writers help plan your trip? Go to washingtonpost.com/goingourway for more information.

Health and Science

Write health-science@washpost.com or send your letters to The Post address to the attention of Health and Science.

How to Draw ...

Find this feature in the Sunday COMICS. Submit your drawings to www.kidcartoonists.com.

John Kelly's Washington

Have a question about buildings, streets, people past and present in D.C.? Send it to ANSWER MAN, Kelly's alter ego, to find the answer at kellyj@washpost.com.

KidsPost

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Letters to the Editor

Respond to Post content by telling the paper's editor what you think — briefly: letters@washpost.com

LOCAL OPINIONS At Pepco, we're working

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"where there is arguably curated, well-edited ws," said Post
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On the web

Do squirrels

Tweet

Local Blog Network

washingtonpost.com/blogs/all-opinions-are-welcome

Some of Washington's best bloggers share their stories. Public service announcements inform, but they also

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A place for commentary about where we live, 300 to 500 words on timely local topics. Check the Sunday METRO section for the next week's topic. Submissions must include name, e-mail address, street address and phone number. Read what others have to say and get the submission procedure at washingtonpost.com/localopinions.

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The ombudsman represents the interests of readers, holds *The Post* to high standards and explains the “how” and “why” behind stories and decisions made by *The Post*. Send your concerns and praise to ombudsman@washpost.com or call 202-334-7582.

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The Metro section covers the local news. Its editors want readers to: Talk to us. Talk to newsmakers. Talk to each other. Join the conversation at postlocal.com.

Tom Sietsema Dining

Send your thoughts, wishes and, yes, gripes to *asktom@washpost.com*.

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To respond to one of the TRAVEL section articles, write travel@washpost.com or send to Washington Post Travel Section, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071.

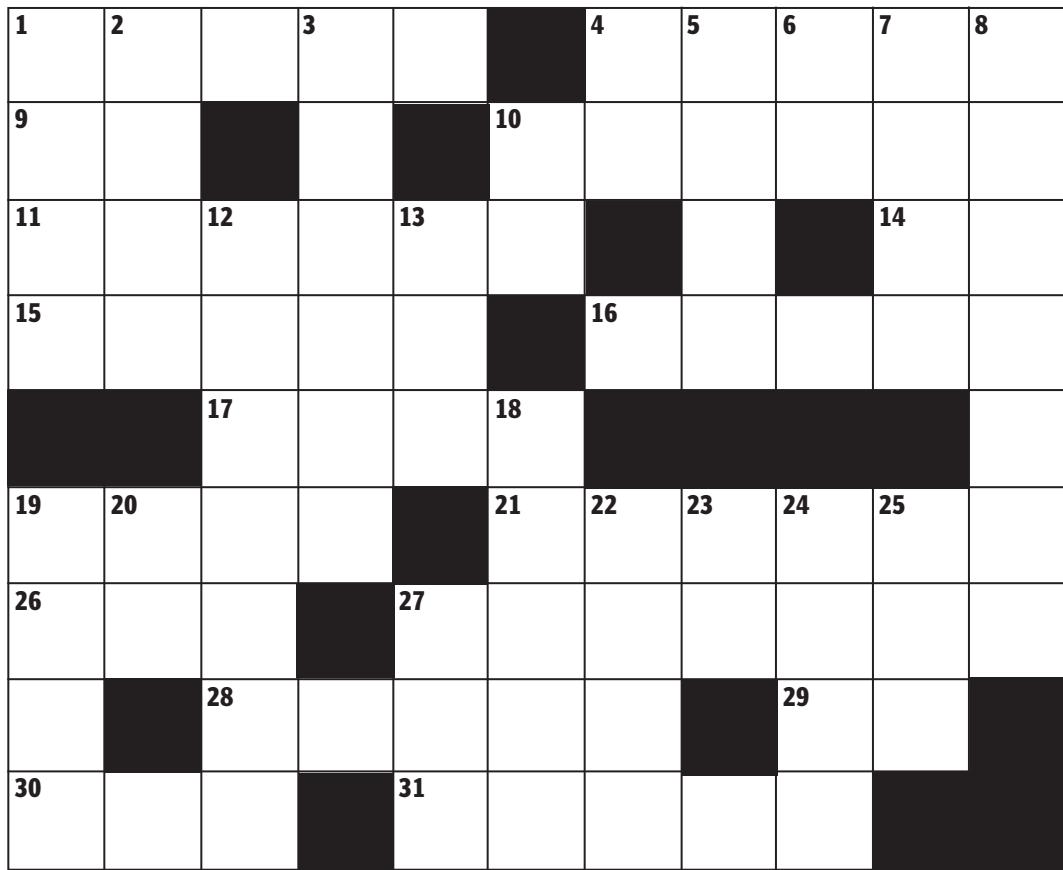
WP Magazine

Send feedback to wpletters@washpost.com or share them online at washingtonpost.com.



From Letters to Letters

The theme of this crossword puzzle is letters. It includes many terms related to writing letters to the editor and communicating ideas in writing. After completing the crossword puzzle, select five answers to compose an informative paragraph about the art of letter writing.



Across

1. Express in words
4. This island's capital is Oranjestad.
9. Emergency Room (abbrev.)
10. Logic
11. One who is rigid, unyielding
14. Nova Scotia (abbrev.)
15. Dull, lacking distinction
16. To subscribe again
17. Necessity, requirement
19. Receive a message
21. Cleric
26. Opposite of in
27. Epistles
28. French brand of mineral water
29. Lebanon (abbrev.)
30. Night before a special observance
31. Electronic correspondence

Down

1. A word of action
2. Expressed aloud
3. Speaker's ___ is an outdoor place for public speaking, debate and discussion. A well-known one is in Hyde Park in London.
4. Associate Editor (abbrev.)
5. Competition between runners, horses or vehicles
6. Plural, objective pronoun
7. It may be picked; an expression about an unresolved issue
8. They are given in response to questions.
10. Road (abbrev.)
12. Endangered species living in coastal waters of the tropical Atlantic
13. Poem of praise
18. Desired goal; Martin Luther King Jr. had one
19. Improve one's skills
20. European Union (abbrev.)
22. Active volcano on the coast of Sicily
23. Connecticut (postal code)
24. Express
25. It makes prospectors happy
27. Opposite of truth

Sunday OPINION

OMBUDSMAN | ANDREW ALEXANDER

How to be a man, or woman, of letters

You're reading *The Post* and something sets you off. You're steamed. Fed up. Who does so-and-so think he is, making such an idiotic statement? Somebody needs to set the record straight. So you crank up your computer and fire off a beautifully crafted, perfectly reasoned letter to the editor.

Good luck. You have less than a 4 percent chance that it will get published.

The Post receives an average of 300 letters to the editor a day, or more than 109,000 a year. Only about 3,900 are selected for publication; roughly 75 a week.

Long odds. But there's good news. At a time when there are several ways to interact with *The Post* online (through comments, discussion groups, live chats and polls, among others), the newspaper is also receiving — and publishing — more letters to the editor.

"In an era where there are a million comments out there, there is arguably even more of a benefit to having a curated, well-edited, intelligent page of readers' views," said *Post* Editorial Page Editor Fred Hiatt.

The chances of having your letter selected for publication may seem remote. But Letters Editor Michael Larabee insisted it's "not a shot in the dark" if you follow some tips.

Brevity matters. *Post* guidelines urge that letters not exceed 200 words. "But 150 is better," Larabee said. "And if you can do it in 100 words, wonderful."

Timeliness is critical. Hiatt noted that years ago, when most letters were sent by mail, it was "not unusual to run a letter about something that happened 10 or 15 days earlier." Today, most letters arrive by e-mail (letters@washpost.com) and are published within several days. "There is

an advantage to being fast," said Larabee, adding that the volume of letters on some topics is so great that he often selects the first well-written one.

Letters can be sharp but shouldn't slash. "Sometimes zingers go over the line," said Larabee. "I tend to have a little bit of a soft spot for constructive criticism."

Another tip: Consider sending your letter on a Friday afternoon. Fewer arrive then, when Larabee often is searching for timely ones to fill the Monday or Tuesday editorial pages.

And it's okay to have fun. Earlier this month, *The Post* ran a two-sentence letter about a headline that referred to a "criticizer" of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. "I hate to be a critic, but I think an editizer missed something," wrote Marianne Marsolais, a reader from Springfield.

If you've been attacked in a *Post* editorial, your rebuttal letter stands a better chance. "If we run an editorial that really takes someone on," said Hiatt, "we do our best to let them have their say."

Locals have a better shot than out-of-towners. "We like to have the lion's share coming from our [print] circulation area," said Larabee.

And well-written letters from average citizens often trump those from government big shots or other notables. "A lot of those people are able to put out a press release on their own," Hiatt noted.

Larabee, as gatekeeper, reads all letters. Those he selects go to a staff member who vets them. Writers are contacted to verify their identity, and the staff member often quizzes them to ensure that they haven't concealed a self-interest that should be shared with readers.

All letters are edited, and the writers approve substantive revisions. The copy

desk fact-checks the letters and, working with the writers, fine-tunes them for publication.

If a letter is critical of a *Post* reporter or columnist, he or she is shown a copy before publication and asked about its fairness and accuracy. "We listen to what they have to say," said Larabee, "but they don't have veto power."

That's evident in each Saturday's Free for All, an entire page filled with often-withering criticism of *The Post*'s journalism. Credibility is enhanced when incensed readers are allowed to strike back.

In the past year, the editorial page has been redesigned to accommodate more letters. The lower left corner of the page now regularly highlights especially provocative opinions, often on local issues. Hiatt said the goal is to offer a daily selection that is "interesting to read, lively and fun" and also "provocative of further letters." It's okay to take issue with another letter writer.

Newspapers inform, but they also incite. And nothing embodies the First Amendment like a riotous exchange of views on the opinion pages.

If something in *The Post* stirs you, sound off with a letter to the editor. But do it fast. Be concise. And if it makes sense, send it Friday afternoon.

Andrew Alexander began his two-year term as The Washington Post's ombudsman on February 22, 2009. In his first column he wrote: "If I do my job well, readers will be empowered, and The Post will be more accountable, trusted and essential." This column was originally published February 21, 2010.

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The Article

A case of aid gone bad in Colombia

BY KAREN DEYOUNG
AND CLAUDIA J. DUQUE

• Originally Published August 21, 2011

The Obama administration often cites Colombia's thriving democracy as proof that U.S. assistance, know-how and commitment can turn around a potentially failed state under terrorist siege.

The country's U.S.-funded counter-insurgency campaign against a Marxist rebel group — and the civilian and military coordination behind it — are viewed as so successful that it has become a model for strategy in Afghanistan.

But new revelations in long-running political scandals under former president Alvaro Uribe, a close U.S. ally throughout his eight-year tenure, have implicated American aid, and possibly U.S. officials, in egregious abuses of power and illegal actions by the Colombian government under the guise of fighting terrorism and drug smuggling.

American cash, equipment and training, supplied to elite units of the Colombian intelligence service over the past decade to help smash cocaine-trafficking rings, were used to carry out spying operations and smear campaigns against Supreme Court justices, Uribe's political opponents and civil society groups, according to law enforcement documents obtained by *The Washington Post* and interviews with prosecutors and former Colombian intelligence officials.

The revelations are part of a widening

investigation by the Colombian attorney general's office against the Department of Administrative Security, or DAS. Six former high-ranking intelligence officials have confessed to crimes, and more than a dozen other agency operatives are on trial. Several of Uribe's closest aides have come under scrutiny, and Uribe is under investigation by a special legislative commission.

U.S. officials have denied knowledge of or involvement in illegal acts committed by the DAS, and Colombian prosecutors have not alleged any American collaboration. But the story of what the DAS did with much of the U.S. aid it received is a cautionary tale of unintended consequences. Just as in Afghanistan and other countries where the United States is intensely focused on winning counterterrorism allies, some recipients of aid to Colombia clearly diverted it to their own political agendas.

For more than a decade, under three administrations, Colombia has been Washington's closest friend in Latin America and the biggest recipient of military and economic assistance — \$6 billion during Uribe's 2002-10 presidency. The annual total has fallen only slightly during the Obama administration, to just over a half-billion dollars in combined aid this year.

Although significant gains were made against the rebels and drug-trafficking groups, former high-ranking intelligence agents say the DAS under Uribe emphasized political targets over insurgents and drug lords. The steady flow of new revelations has continued to taint Colombia's reputation, even as

The Right of Reply

GERALD MARTINEAU/THE WASHINGTON POST

Alvaro Uribe, former president of Colombia

It is only fair.

When individuals or groups are criticized in the media, they should be allowed to give their perspective. Whether in interviews or letters to the editor, they have the right of reply.

Karen DeYoung and Claudia J. Duque are reporting on an investigation being conducted by the Colombian attorney general's office. Alvaro Uribe, "a close U.S. ally throughout his eight-year tenure," was president during the period under scrutiny.

As his administration's efforts and his reputation are questioned, Uribe voices his rebuttal in a letter to the editor.

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RICH LIPSKI/THE WASHINGTON POST

Columbian President Alvaro Uribe (L) meets with Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) during a Senate Foreign Relations meeting at Capitol Hill on September 24, 2002.

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a government led by Uribe's successor and former defense minister, Juan Manuel Santos, has pledged to replace the DAS with a new intelligence agency this fall.

Prosecutors say the Uribe government wanted to "neutralize" the Supreme Court because its investigative magistrates were unraveling ties between presidential allies in the Colombian congress and drug-trafficking paramilitary groups. Basing their case on thousands of pages of DAS documents and the testimony of nine top former DAS officials, the prosecutors say the agency was directed by the president's office to collect the banking records of magistrates, follow their families, bug their offices and analyze their court rulings.

"All the activity mounted against us — following us, intercepting our telephones — had one central purpose, to intimidate us," said Ivan Velasquez, the court's lead investigative magistrate and a primary target of the DAS surveillance.

Gustavo Sierra, the imprisoned former DAS chief of analysis, who reviewed intelligence briefs that were sent to the presidency, said that targeting the court "was the priority" for the DAS under Uribe. "They hardly ever gave orders against narco-trafficking or guerrillas," Sierra said in an interview.

Resources and guidance

Some of those charged or under investigation have described the importance of U.S. intelligence resources and guidance, and say they regularly briefed embassy "liaison" officials on their

intelligence-gathering activities. "We were organized through the American Embassy," said William Romero, who ran the DAS's network of informants and oversaw infiltration of the Supreme Court. Like many of the top DAS officials in jail or facing charges, he received CIA training. Some were given scholarships to complete coursework on intelligence-gathering at American universities.

Romero, who has accepted a plea agreement from prosecutors in exchange for his cooperation, said in an interview that DAS units depended on U.S.-supplied computers, wiretapping devices, cameras and mobile phone interception systems, as well as rent for safe houses and petty cash for gasoline. "We could have operated"

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without U.S. assistance, he said, "but not with the same effectiveness."

One unit dependent on CIA aid, according to the testimony of former DAS officials in depositions, was the National and International Observations Group.

Set up to root out ties between foreign operatives and Colombian guerrillas, it turned its attention to the Supreme Court after magistrates began investigating the president's cousin, then-Sen. Mario Uribe, said a former director, German Ospina, in a deposition to prosecutors. The orders came "from the presidency; they wanted immediate results," Ospina told prosecutors.

Another unit that operated for eight months in 2005, the Group to Analyze Terrorist Organization Media, assembled dossiers on labor leaders, broke into their offices and videotaped union activists. The United States provided equipment and tens of thousands of dollars, according to an internal DAS report, and the unit's members regularly met with an embassy official they remembered as "Chris Sullivan."

"When we were advancing on certain activities, he would go to see how we were advancing," Jose Gabriel Jimenez, a former analyst in the unit, said during a court hearing.

The CIA declined to comment on any specific allegations or the description of its relationship with the DAS provided by Colombian officials. "The three letters CIA get thrown into the mix on a lot of things, and by a lot of people. That doesn't mean that allegations about the agency are anything more than that," said a U.S. intelligence official, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

As initial DAS revelations emerged in the Colombian media during late summer 2009, then-U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield called an embassy-wide meeting and asked which U.S.

agencies represented were working with the DAS, according to a secret State Department cable released by WikiLeaks. Representatives from eight agencies raised their hands — including the CIA, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service. All agencies, Brownfield reported in the Sept. 9 cable, "reaffirmed that they had no knowledge of or connection to the illegal activity and agreed to continue reducing their exposure to the agency."

Brownfield, in subsequent meetings with Uribe and other officials, urged the government to get out in front of the disclosures and warned that they could compromise the U.S.-Colombia partnership.

"If another DAS scandal erupted, our Plan B was to terminate all association with DAS. Immediately," Brownfield reported telling Francisco Santos, Uribe's vice president, and DAS Director Felipe Munoz on Sept. 16, 2009.

Still, the relationship continued for an additional seven months. In April 2010, Brownfield announced that all U.S. funds previously directed to the DAS would henceforth go to Colombia's national police. Today, the 51-year-old DAS, with 6,000 employees, multiple roles and an annual budget of \$220 million, still limps along. But Munoz has been under investigation, as have four other former DAS directors.

Uribe, speaking through his lawyer, Jaime Granados, declined a request for an interview. But the former president has denied that he oversaw illegal activities and said officials from his government were being persecuted politically. Four of his top aides are under investigation, and his chief of staff, Bernardo Moreno, is jailed and awaiting trial on conspiracy and other charges.

Years of trouble

Interviews with former U.S. officials and evidence surfacing in the DAS investigation show that the agency has

for years committed serious crimes, a propensity for illegal actions not unknown to embassy officials.

The first DAS director in Uribe's presidency, Jorge Noguera — whom the U.S. Embassy in 2005 considered "pro-U.S. and an honest technocrat" and recommended to be a member of Interpol for Latin America, according to WikiLeaks cables — is on trial and accused of having helped hit men assassinate union activists. Last year, prosecutors accused another former DAS director of having helped plan the 1989 assassination of front-running presidential candidate, Luis Carlos Galan.

Myles Frechette, the U.S. ambassador to Colombia from 1994 to 1997, said that even in his tenure American officials believed that DAS units were tainted by corruption and linked to traffickers. But he said the embassy needed a partner to develop intelligence on drug smugglers and guerrillas.

"All the people who worked with me at the embassy said to me, 'You can't really trust the DAS,'" said Frechette, adding that he thinks the DAS has some of the hallmarks of a criminal enterprise.

Several senior U.S. diplomats posted to the embassy in more recent years said they had no knowledge that U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies were involved in DAS dirty tricks, but all said it would not surprise them.

"There were concerns about some kinds of activities, but also a need in the name of U.S. interests to preserve the relationship," said one diplomat who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "I'm reasonably confident our support was correct." ■

Duque is a freelance journalist based in Bogota, Colombia. Correspondent Juan Forero, also based in Bogota, contributed to this report.

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Letter to the Editor

Columbia's fight against terrorism

• Originally Published August 29, 2011

The Aug. 22 front-page article "A case of aid gone bad in Columbia" raised questions about the methods and results of Colombian efforts to build a society free of terrorism and narco-trafficking and move the country off the path toward a failed state. It also questioned U.S. support to Colombia, suggesting that resources provided were used for criminal purposes with the direct involvement of my administration, all to "neutralize the Supreme Court because its investigative magistrates were unraveling ties between allies in the Colombian congress and drug-trafficking paramilitary groups."

Such reckless distortions harm the image of a government that dismantled the paramilitary structures in Colombia and extradited their kingpins to the United States. During my administration, more than 1,100 drug dealers were extradited, illicit crops were reduced by 50 percent, and narco-terrorist organizations such as FARC and ELN were substantially weakened. Most important, these unquestionable results were achieved with the transparent and rigorous support of the U.S. government.

As to the claims that our government was focused on obstructing justice and surveilling union leaders: Have the authors reviewed all the operational and budgetary support given to the judiciary branch or the effective protection and guarantees given to union leaders, journalists and members of opposition parties? As I have stated in testimony to Colombia's congress, during my presidency no action was every ordered against members of the Supreme Court or any action against the law.

For eight years, my administration worked hard to restore confidence and to create a path to prosperity for all Colombians. We succeeded in that effort thanks to our daily commitment to work with transparency, consistency and competence, open to public scrutiny.

—Avaro Uribe, Bogota



GERALD MARTINEAU/THE WASHINGTON POST

President George W. Bush presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to then-president of Colombia Alvaro Uribe. The ceremony took place January 13, 2008, in the White House East Room.

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A Study: Letter to the Editor

Just as editorials, letters to the editor offer an opinion. Writers explain, they complain and they exclaim. They find fault and they praise.

Read the sampling of letters to the editor. Apply the six questions to each letter.

1. What is the subject of the letter?
2. What is the point of view of the writer?
3. What is the purpose of the piece?
4. In what way does the writer's background, when provided, give insight into his or her position?
5. Is the writer convincing? Why or why not?
6. What additional information would you like to have?

Metro's overreliance on escalators

• *Originally Published July 26, 2011*

What do you call a 300-person chain squeezing through a two-foot-wide exit at a snail's pace, often against the traffic of riders going the other way? Rush-hour Metro riders exiting the platform at the Dupont Circle station, where half the escalators are usually in disrepair, often forcing riders to use a single broken escalator.

The same goes for other busy Metro stations, such as Farragut North and West, Metro Center and Gallery Place. Why does Metro force riders to rely on escalators even to climb 15 or 20 feet? Wouldn't replacing the escalators with wide stairways be a lot more cost-effective despite the higher initial capital costs? Granted, this may also alter the original design and appearance — but Metro needs to bit the bullet sooner or later.

Or is the reliance on escalators the result of an unholy, unwritten agreement between Metrorail and escalator unions or manufacturers? Or a round-about subsidy of the region's athletic clubs? Many riders won't want to climb up or down 130 steps at Dupont Circle (thought they are often forced to), but most can easily use stairways to climb as much as 50 feet, and those who cannot can use the elevators.

J. Ram Ray, *Silver Spring*

Did anyone ask the horses?

• *Originally Published July 26, 2011*

Reading the July 23 front-page article "In the heat of battle," it struck me that humans could decide whether or not to go forward with the re-enactment of the Civil War's Battle of Bull Run in light of the extreme weather; the horses, however, had no choice. I daresay the horses would have made a different decision.

Annette Deming, *Columbia*

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A collective effort to heal the bay

• *Originally Published July 29, 2011*

Thanks for Victor Zapana's inspiring story about Katherine Antos of the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program and her success in getting six state governments and the District to submit "pollution diets" that will reduce the levels of phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment that flow into the Chesapeake Bay [“Pollution diets” may cure Chesapeake,” Metro, July 21]. Ms Antos is the kind of leader we need, one who can negotiate and get people to work together and compromise. But, as she admits, not even six state governments and the EPA working together will be able to clean up the bay. It's going to take homeowners, industries, farms and businesses in the watershed recognizing that they'll have to change habits and take action to save the bay.

Linda Burchfiel, *McLean*

The writer is the at-large representative on Fairfax County's Environmental Quality Advisory Council.

Profiles in political courage

• *Originally Published August 12, 2011*

I was struck by the coincidence of the deaths on Sunday of former New York governor Hugh L. Carey and former senator Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon [Metro, Aug. 8]. These men, of different parties, with temperaments as unlike as could be — Carey, boisterous, tempestuous and unpredictable; Hatfield, dignified, mild-mannered and soft-spoken — each had the courage to buck party orthodoxy: Carey in his successful effort to save New York City from bankruptcy and Hatfield in opposing the Vietnam war.

The passing on the same day of these two men highlights the apparent absence on the national political scene of anyone who will rise above partisanship and do what is right to address the daunting problems the nation faces today.

Joseph A. Condo, *McLean*

Forecast: Scattered Violence

• *Originally Published August 27, 2011*

I suppose it's commendable that Peaceoholics wants to “diffuse” violence in the District [Metro, Aug. 18], so it's thinned out a bit and not limited to just a few neighborhoods. But if members really want to live up to their name, they should “defuse” it.

Don Hirschfeld, *Temple Hills*

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Murdoch News



Thursday, July 21, 2011

Tom Toles editorial cartoon has a news peg.

BACKGROUND

Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. was involved in a phone-hacking scandal in July 2011. The Washington Post's Erik Wemple reported on July 22: "A July 4 story in the Guardian reignited this five-year-old controversy by revealing that News Corp's Sunday tabloid News of the World in 2002 hacked into the voicemail of then 13-year-old Milly Dowler. The paper's 'voicemail interceptions' — News Corps preferred euphemism for hacking — gave Dowler's family false hope that she was alive. She was later found murdered."

MURDOCH AND SON RESPOND

Rupert Murdoch and his son, James, faced questions of a committee of Parliament. They were asked if they knew of any facts regarding the hacking of Dowler and others. Both Murdochs shook their heads. According to the transcript of the committee, James replies, "We only seen the allegation that have been made in the press and we are actively trying ... we are trying to learn what happened."

In his final statement, Rupert Murdoch stated, "I have made my share of mistakes. But I have never felt more sick" than over the Milly Dowler incident. ... "Above all, I hope we will come to understand the wrongs of the past and prevent them from happening again. ... I am committed to doing everything in my power to make this happen."

What Do You Think?

After reading “Murdoch News,” the July 21 visual commentary by *The Washington Post’s* editorial cartoonist Tom Toles, answer the five questions.



1. Who is pictured in the editorial cartoon?
2. Why do you think Toles emphasized “NEWS”?
3. In the lower right of the cartoon is Toles’ alter ego. What does his commentary add to conveying Toles’ point of view?
4. Why is the question posed by Murdoch, and Toles — How was I supposed to know? — a question that every news consumer and producer should ask?
5. The 5Ws and H of news apply to being a responsible reader or consumer of the news: WHO is responsible for the content of news stories?

WHAT is important for you to know about your school? Your community? Your country?

WHERE can you locate accurate information about your school? Your community? Your country?

WHEN should you question what is reported? Ask yourself: Could that *really* be true?

WHY are both producers and consumers of news responsible for the accuracy, balance and clarity of news?

HOW can readers of news stories relate their reaction to what has/has not been published?

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Montgomery curfew debate intensifies

BY DAN MORSE
AND MICHAEL LARIS

• Originally Published September 1, 2011

A group of about 15 young men exited the Silver Spring Metro station on a recent Friday night, heading toward the area's bustling open-air restaurant district.

Just before 10 p.m. they passed a police lieutenant. No hellos or smiles, but plenty of tattoos and stares.

"My hunch is that's not a good crowd," Montgomery County police Lt. Robert Carter said, calling into his radio to alert fellow officers to keep track of them.

For 38 minutes they watched. The group made its way to Dixon Avenue, a darkened street just off the main strip. Officers confronted them and started asking questions. Just a month earlier on those same streets, more than 50 young men, many of them gang members, got into nighttime brawls that lasted hours. When police chased them from one spot, the group gathered a few blocks away and kept fighting. By the end, a female had been stabbed.

That melee pushed Montgomery's top elected official, County Executive Isiah Leggett (D), to propose a countywide curfew for ages 17 and younger: midnight on weekends, 11 p.m. during the week.

Police say that there's been an uptick in arrests of juveniles and that a curfew law would give officers a valuable tool to head off trouble. Neighboring Prince George's County and the District have curfews, which police say are pushing more youths into Montgomery late at night. Philadelphia officials recently toughened their teen curfew to tamp down on flash mobs.



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST
Teens and young adults hang out in Silver Spring. County Executive Isiah Leggett has proposed a curfew for ages 17 and younger.

But others in Montgomery say a curfew is an overreaction, wouldn't be effective and — at its worst — could lead to racial profiling. Most crimes committed nationwide by young people don't occur late at night, research has shown. The same holds true in Montgomery, where 92 percent of assaults and 83 percent of robberies for which juveniles were arrested last year happened outside the proposed curfew's hours.

As the Montgomery County Council prepares to vote on the measure this fall, the debate is intensifying. "Parents are divided on this issue between those who believe it is an unnecessary intrusion into how they raise their children and parents who believe it will make the community safer,"

said council member Roger Berliner (D-Potomac-Bethesda), a curfew skeptic.

On Wednesday, Leggett proposed amendments to the bill to tone it down. Youths coming home from movies, concerts and sporting events would be exempted. Rather than detain curfew violators, the officers would issue a civil citation, punishable by a fine of up to \$100 for the first offense. Then, if the kids don't go, officers could arrest them for failing to obey a lawful order. Forcing parents of curfew violators to attend parenting classes is no longer part of the proposed curfew.

When officers approached the group on Dixon Avenue, the teenagers answered

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questions and had their pockets searched and their tattoos photographed. Police found no weapons or drugs and didn't charge anyone.

"They just automatically assumed we were thugs, or we were about to cause some trouble or go fight," said Mike Brown, 18, a James Hubert Blake High School student who ended his junior year with a 3.1 GPA and thinks the youths were targeted because they are black.

Carter said it was not about race. The officer had exchanged friendly hellos with other black teens that night, but this group was larger and passed by without a word. He said he "absolutely would have done the same thing" had the youths been white.

Although Brown didn't like the way he and his friends were stopped, he's not anti-curfew. He said he has seen some late-night fights in Silver Spring and thinks the curfew could help.

The proposed curfew is county-wide, but much of the debate has focused on downtown Silver Spring, a once lackluster stretch that has been transformed in recent years and now draws big crowds. This month, the Fillmore theater is scheduled to open and bring in even more people. As recent nighttime visits show, the streets are busy and friendly.

After 11 p.m. Friday, Guinean nanny Amina Traore, 23, emerged from Ramadan services at a nearby civic center wearing a black-and-white African gown. Her 3-year-old nephew ran up and down the closed-off street yelling, "I'm Spider-Man-Superman!"

Two-year-old Bryanna Rodriguez spun in circles, licking vanilla ice cream that looked pink in the red-neon glow of Silver Spring's Majestic theater. Bryan Rodriguez, 5, climbed into their younger brother, Bryseidy's, stroller, lying back to get comfortable. Their parents, Eudy Rodriguez and Yudi Arevalo, both 23, enjoy the downtown but don't always feel secure.

Problems percolate when crowds surge with the pristine weather or during festivals, Rodriguez said, calling the curfew "100 percent a good idea." Some young people "just make dramas for nothing, fighting," Arevalo said.

Just before 1 a.m. Saturday, Yory Martinez, 17, of Rockville walked in the same area with a friend. Martinez is starting his junior year in high school. He could, under the curfew proposal, be a violator.

"It's not right," Martinez said. "It's the weekend. It's supposed to be enjoyed, not under control."

Leggett, the leading proponent of the curfew, said the aim is to stop trouble before it happens. "I'm going to err on the side of providing protection," Leggett said. "You don't want to wait until the problem consumes you. I'm not going to do that."

Although overall crime and gang incidents in the county are down, Leggett and Police Chief J. Thomas Manger said they worry about increased juvenile arrests, and not just in Silver Spring.

At a recent council meeting, Manger ticked off some summertime incidents: 12:45 a.m., Bethesda, three juveniles arrested trying to break into a car; 3 a.m., a neighborhood four miles west of downtown Silver Spring, two groups of kids flashed gang signs, and one was stabbed; 12:30 a.m., Olney, a juvenile stabbed during a drug deal.

But such late-night crimes are hardly the norm. Last year in the county, youths were arrested in connection with about 323 assaults, only 25 of which happened after proposed curfew hours. Juveniles were arrested in connection with 54 robberies in 2010, nine of those during times the curfew would be in effect.

"Typically curfews aren't that effective. They target the wrong hours, and they don't have any teeth," said John Roman, a senior fellow in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, which studied Prince George's County's curfew in the late 1990s.

Council members Phil Andrews (D-Gaithersburg-Rockville) and Marc Elrich (D-At Large) said they also are concerned about the possibility of racial profiling. And they said a curfew wouldn't deter the most dangerous teenagers.

Council member Craig Rice (D-Upcounty), who is black, said he's "90 percent there" in supporting the curfew, even though he said he was once a teenage victim of racial profiling. Rice said that when he was 17, he was pulled over while driving a Volvo and listening to hip-hop.

Still, Rice said he thinks a curfew could be effective.

Proponents also stress that although most teens hang out peacefully, sometimes things can go bad quickly.

On a recent Friday night, Sgt. Mark Miller was on patrol in downtown Silver Spring. By 11:45 p.m., the crowd had thinned enough for him to take a dinner break at a nearby police station, but he only got a few bites down.

One mile north, said the call on his radio, someone fired a gun. Minutes later, he pulled up to a parking lot teeming with teenagers and young adults.

Miller and his colleagues started piecing together what happened: A teenager threw a party and, as word spread through text messages, the crowd swelled to more than 50.

One uninvited guest took a Sony PlayStation III, tucked it in his bag and left. A host followed him into a parking lot, and the thief pulled a gun from his trunk. A shot was fired, but no one was struck. Still, dozens of teenagers continued to hang around within two blocks of the party. It was 12:30 a.m. Miller asked a handful their ages; 16, 17, 18, 19, they said. Miller has concerns about a curfew and worries it could eat up his patrol time. He also wanted

the youngest people in the crowd to go home but had no way to force them. "This would be a nice time to have that law," he said. ■

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

BY ROBERT CARTER SILVER SPRING

A cop on curfews: How we spot the good kids

• Originally Published August 5, 2011

In her July 29 column on the proposed Montgomery County curfew, Petula Dvorak asked: "So, how exactly do they [the police] plan on telling the good kids from the bad ones?" As the police officer she quoted in the column, I judge it's my duty to answer.

I understand that some cops of yesteryear judged a "book by its cover." The good news is today's Montgomery County police are part of one of the first generations of Americans to have grown up "color blind," or for that matter, blind to all bias. They'll judge these kids based on something else, something they have learned quickly on this job.

They won't be judging the kids out on a date, or the kids shooting baskets at the rec center or swing dancing in Cabin John. It won't be the kids watching movies or eating at Lebanese Taverna, or those ice skating in the winter. And it won't be the kids at the skateboard park, the ones watching a high school football game, or those coming from a Friday night religious meeting.

We are able to tell the bad kids based on their behavior. It's the kids who come to hang out but never spend a dime at area businesses. The ones dropping the "F-bomb" so loud that you cringe when you're walking by with your family. The ones who comment on the appearance of your daughters, walking behind them and taunting with comments so crude it would make a sailor blush. The ones who end up staying late, wanting to fistfight kids from other neighborhoods because of some street name or boundary line that is important only in their minds. The ones who follow you as you walk out of Silver Spring into the adjoining



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

Teenagers and young adults occupy downtown Silver Spring to the dismay of some law enforcement and others, prompting a proposal for a curfew in Montgomery County.

neighborhoods, snatching your iPhone and running to the Metro to get home. They're the ones who take your loose change and your stereo from your unlocked car as it sits in the parking garage waiting for you and your family to finish your ice cream.

Petula Dvorak is right: If parents would impose their own curfews, the government wouldn't need to. But the harsh reality is that some parents aren't as capable, caring or willing as Dvorak or the activists are speaking out against this curfew. Identifying the bad kids is very simple, and they don't need to wear an ID card for the police to figure it out. And the kids who are engaging

in normal weekend night activities will not be the subjects of a teen witch hunt. This is only meant as a tool for the police to use to keep kids from getting in trouble (both as victims or as suspects), or to end trouble early when warnings to go home are not heeded.

And even if all I do is I take one bad kid off the street for one night, that's one less opportunity, and one less victim, that he or she will be able to take advantage of in my community. ■

The writer is a deputy commander for the Silver Spring District of the Montgomery County Police Department.

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Academic Content Standards

This lesson addresses academic content standards of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Maryland

English: The student will demonstrate the ability to respond to a text by employing personal experiences and critical analysis (Goal 1 Reading, Reviewing and Responding to Texts)

- The student will use after-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by summarizing, comparing, contrasting, synthesizing, drawing conclusions, and validating the purpose of reading. (Indicator 1.1.3)
- The student will extend or further develop meaning by explaining the implications of the text for the reader or contemporary society (Indicator 1.2.5)

English: The student will compose persuasive texts that support, modify, or refute a position and include effective rhetorical strategies (Indicator 2.1.4)

United States History: Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultural, economic, political and social developments from 1968 to 1980 (Expectation 5)

The Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum Content Standards can be found online at <http://mdk12.org/assessments/standards/9-12.html>

Virginia

English: The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction.

- c) Explain the author's purpose.
- e) Draw conclusions, using information from texts. (Grade 4, 4.5)

English: The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of informational texts.

- c) Distinguish fact from opinion in newspapers, magazines, and other print media.
- d) Identify the source, viewpoint, and purpose of texts.
- f) Summarize what is read.
- g) Organize and synthesize information for use in written and oral presentations. (Grade 7, 7.6)

Virginia, U.S. History: The student will demonstrate economic, social, cultural and political developments in recent decades and today (VUS.15)

Standards of Learning currently in effect for Virginia Public Schools can be found online at www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/index.shtml

Washington, D.C.

English/Language Arts: Determine an author's position (i.e., what the author is arguing), providing supporting evidence from the text. (Argument and Persuasive Text, Grade 5, 5.IT-A.7)

English/Language Arts: Write persuasive (pro/con) essays that

- include a well-defined thesis that sets forth a clear and knowledgeable position, theory, or generalization;
- support arguments with well-articulated evidence, examples, and reasoning, differentiating between evidence and opinion, and
- arrange details, reasons, and examples effectively, anticipating and answering reader concerns and counterarguments. (Expository Writing, Grade 8, 8.W-E.5)

Reading/English Language Arts: Evaluate the arguments an author uses in a speech or op-ed to refute opposing or counterarguments and address reader or listener concerns. (Argument and Persuasive Text, Grade 11, 11.IT-A11)