

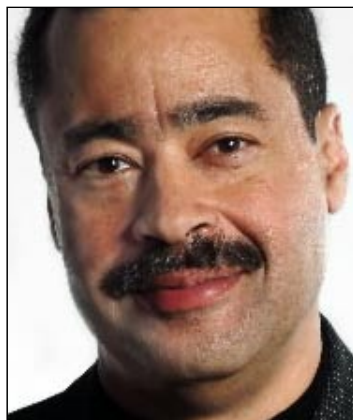
INSIDE JOURNALISM

Volume 1, Issue 8

Columns of Thought



*Good Listening,
Good Reporting,
Good Arguments
Make for a Good
Post Columnist*



Who's Who? See Page 3

4 Meet the Columnist

9 How To Write a Column

14 You and Your Rights: Religious Freedom and Tolerance



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Composing Columns

KidsPost Article: "It's His Opinion"

The INSIDE Journalism curriculum guide provides information and resources that can be used on many grade levels and in many subject areas. Here are a few suggestions for using the material in this guide.

Think about Columnists

Distinguish news from editorial from column writing. This issue of INSIDE Journalism focuses on column writing and newspaper columnists, so-called because they write articles called columns. Unlike a good reporter, who tries to hide his personality, the good columnist often tries to become a personality.

In that way, a columnist can help give a newspaper its character and make it more interesting for readers. At a large newspaper such as The Post, there's a columnist for almost every topic you can imagine in most sections. In KidsPost, Fred Bowen writes a weekly column on sports.

Share

Use "The Columnist Connection" with older students. This column by The Post Ombudsman Michael Getler relates how columnists fulfill the need of newspapers "to connect with readers and communities." (For more on the ombudsman, read "Now You Are in the Know" curriculum guide.)

Find a Column

You can tell a column from other articles in several ways. All have the name of the author in larger type at the top. (Making their names bigger than reporters' bylines is part of that "becoming a personality" idea). Most express the personal opinions of the author. Some use the third person; others use the word "I"—as in "I think it," "I believe it" and "I can't

believe it." Have students locate a column in today's Post. Who is the columnist? Where is it? After reading the column, have them write a note to the columnist.

"Either way, good or bad, hugs or heckles, this is the best thing about being a columnist. With your actions, there is a corresponding reaction," wrote Bill Plaschke, a Los Angeles Times sports columnist. "It is a constant, ever-changing public report card that slowly teaches the columnist not just about his community, but about himself. It is evidence that people are being touched. It is the feedback that us crazy journalists seek most, from the people who matter most."

Meet the Columnist

Marc Fisher has worked at The Post for almost 20 years. In 2000, he began his column that appears in the Metro section. Give students "Meet the Columnist."

Learn About Ledes

Give students "Parts of Speech at the Beginning." You may need to review the parts of speech before giving this assignment. If students cannot find examples from The Post, ask them to write their own ledes, beginning with the correct part of speech.

Older students should be given "Take the Lede." The page reference tells students in which section of the paper each lede was printed. Can they

In the Know

Column: A signed article of opinion or strong personal expression, frequently by an expert or authority, that appears regularly in a publication

Columnist: Writer who provides commentary on lives, lifestyles and issues

Commentary: Explanations and interpretations; personal narrative

Feature: Prominent or special article, story or series in a newspaper or periodical; may be tied to news or of human interest

Lede: The opening line or paragraph of a news article, editorial or feature

Review: Article written to evaluate and to determine the worth of a product (for example: movie, television program, book, music, restaurant)

Syndicated: The work of writers handled by organizations that sell the writers' work to various news media whether it is print or broadcast

tell which are from columns?

Among the examples given is one from Michael Kelly. A gifted writer and editor, Michael Kelly will be posthumously named "Columnist of the Year" at the 2003 National Society of Newspaper Columnists (NSNC) conference. Kelly, who was syndicated by the Washington Post Writers Group, died in Iraq April 3 while embedded with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division. Scheduled to receive the honor on her son's behalf is "Family Almanac" writer Marguerite Kelly, a syndicated columnist in her own right.

For explanations on the categories and more examples go to <http://library.thinkquest.org/50084/write/takelead.html>



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Meet Katharine Graham

Give students “Finding One’s Voice: Katharine Graham.”

This provides students with an introduction to the remarkable woman who was publisher of The Washington Post, 1963-2001. Older students should be encouraged to read Katharine Graham’s *Personal History*. You may wish to play portions of the audio book in which Mrs. Graham reads from her memoir. An excellent companion to her memoir is that of Benjamin Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures*.

Think About Freedom of Religion

Read “You and Your Rights: Religious Freedom and Tolerance” for background. Present the Case Study to students and give the homework assignment. “What Would You Do?” is provided for younger students.

Write

Columnists should inform and entertain readers. Columnists express their opinions, but also include news, interviews and research. Columnists should make readers laugh, cry, think and care. Give students “How to Write a Column.”

Ask students to write a column. They might write MY VIEW (or name their own columns) in response to the “You and Your Rights” material or to what Fisher wrote in his KidsPost-only column, “The Best Approach for Kids Is Not Child’s Play.” You might use material from the “Only a Matter of Opinion?” The Web site includes information on different types of columns (including review, social

and political commentary, how-to).

Enrichment

1. Get to know the work of one columnist. Select one of The Washington Post columnists. Read five or more columns written by him or her. Write a short paper: What do you learn about the world or your community from this columnist? What is her or his point of view? How well did the columnist convey his or her narrative? Do you agree or disagree with the opinions expressed?

2. “Washington Post timeline, 1963-1976” and “A Changing Community, A Changing Role” may be used to stimulate discussion of the time period in print and at The Post.

ANSWERS: Parts of Speech at the Beginning: 1. verb; 2. pronoun; 3. indefinite pronoun used as an adjective; 4. proper noun; 5. article followed by an adjective, explain how hyphenated words create an adjective; 6. preposition; 7. noun.

“It’s His Opinion” can be found at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/education/kidspost/nie/A51164-2003Apr28.html>.

“The Best Approach for Kids Is Not Child’s Play,” a column by Marc Fisher, can be found at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/education/kidspost/nie/A51166-2003Apr28.html>.

ON THE COVER

From the top, left to right: Stephen Barr, Federal Diary; Thomas Boswell, sports; Nora Boustany, Foreign; Donna Britt, Metro; Warren Brown, automotive; Sally Jenkins, sports; Tony Kornheiser, sports; Bob Levey, Metro; Courtland Milloy, Metro; Tom Shales, Style; Michelle Singletary, Color of Money

Resources**On the Web**

➤ <http://library.thinkquest.org/50084/index.shtml>

Only a Matter of Opinion?

“Columns and Commentary,” section of Web site prepared by teachers, provides how-to, types of columns, columnists, models and lesson plans. Also visit the “Art of Writing” section for more examples of ledes.

➤ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/opinion/columns/?nav=hptoc>

Washington Post Columns

A collection of regular contributors and columns organized by sections of The Post. Those by Marc Fisher are included.

➤ <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=1469>

ASNE Awards

Read sample works of winners in commentary and seven other categories.

➤ http://www.spj.org/awards_sdx_gallery/01_col.asp

Society of Professional Journalists

Award winners in annual contest include general and sports columns.

➤ <http://www.columnists.com/>

National Society of Newspaper Columnists

Find code of ethics, commentary, hall of fame, books and links.

IN PRINT

Monica McCabe Cardoza. *You Can Write a Column*.

For focus to closing graph, how to write timely, engaging pieces.

John B. Kachuba, editor. *How to Write Funny*. Examples and interviews with the likes of Dave Barry, Tom Bodett and Roy Blount. How to add humor to columns, short stories and dialogue. Campbell B. Titchener. *Reviewing the Arts*.

How to write reviews of film, television, drama, music and dance.



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How is a writing a column different from writing news stories?

Writing a column is like writing a news article in that I am telling a story about something that's happened, something that tells us about how we live and why we behave as we do. But it's different because I am presenting a point of view—I'm telling the reader what I think about this story. That sounds easier than news reporting because I can just say what's on my mind, but it's actually harder because I have to give readers a reason to care about my opinion.

What can you do as a columnist that "regular" reporters can't do?

The great thing about writing a column is that I can let the news decide what I write about, or I can just follow my interests. And if I want to be funny or even silly, I can do that.

For example?

I can walk down K Street wearing a gas mask to see how people will react. Reporters can do strange stunts too—I once put on a white lab coat and set up a table outside the Post building, where I asked passersby to taste tap water, bottled water and swimming pool water to see just how bad D.C. water was. (People liked the pool water best—seriously!) It's easier for columnists to be a little wacky.

What's fun about being a columnist?

It gives me an excuse to go anywhere, ask anyone anything, and then write whatever I think about what they're doing with their lives. As a reporter, I could do the first two of those things, but not the third.

What's not fun?

Sometimes it's hard to find the time to go out and examine a story at



Meet the Columnist

Metro's Marc Fisher

the street level—and columns really only work if the writer takes you someplace you haven't been.

How did you get to be a columnist?

I was a news reporter and feature writer for 18 years before I wrote my first columns, in the Post Magazine. The editor of the Post's Metro section liked my Magazine column and asked me if I would be willing to make the switch—she didn't know it, but she was offering me the one job I'd always wanted.

Where do you get your ideas?

Columns are everywhere—in my daily life, in my kids' conversations, in e-mails from readers, in hallway chats with Post reporters, in angry or pleasant calls from the people I write about.

How often does your column run?

My usual schedule is Tuesdays, Thursdays and alternate Sundays, but I'm on a slightly reduced schedule for a few months while I work on a book.

Do you hear from readers much?

It depends on the topic and how outrageous a view I've expressed, but I sure do: The average column generates about 40-60 e-mails, maybe a dozen letters and a bunch of phone calls, but the e-mail count often rises well into the hundreds. The record is more than 600 e-mails,

and that happened twice—once for a column criticizing anti-World Bank demonstrators, and once when I defended some Virginia high school students who were expelled for pulling a senior prank.

Do readers ever get mad at you?

Man, do they. I've been accused of being a fascist, a communist, a hater. Angry readers attack me for my politics, race, faith, and age. But most readers who write in just want to keep the debate going, and that's one of the most satisfying parts of writing a column.

Do you pretty much get to say what you want, including opinions?

No one at the Post has ever restricted me from saying anything in the column. My editor will sometimes say that a column wasn't one of my better ones—and sometimes he's right—but he would never kill a column because of a position I took.

Which writers do you admire most?

I grew up in New York City reading great newspaper columnists such as Jimmy Breslin, Pete Hamill, Red Smith and Ira Berkow. My first job was in Miami, where I worked with columnists Charlie Whited, who wrote six columns a week and knew every block in town; Carl Hiaasen, who perfected the art of speaking truth to power; and Dave Barry, who knows that true stories are much more fantastic than fiction. The writers I admire are those who see the world with their own clarity and listen closely to the music of the voices around them: Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, James Joyce and Franz Kafka, Tom Wolfe and Don DeLillo.



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

MARC FISHER

The Best Approach for Kids Is Not Child's Play

After Michael Jordan played his final game in a Washington uniform, I searched through my “filing system,” which is what I call the towering piles of notebooks I’ve hurled randomly around my desk, and found my notes from the day three years ago when he first became a Wizard.

When basketball’s premier star came to Washington (first to be an executive, not a player), the mayor of Washington and other important people announced that the people who would benefit most from Jordan’s presence were—you guessed it—The Children.

“This is someone who is really going to show our children what it is to be a role model,” Mayor Tony Williams said.

Not so fast. Jordan’s an impressive guy, great player, hard worker. But a role model? Almost any child who seeks to follow Jordan’s path is destined to be disappointed. Role models are people who enjoy full, balanced lives in careers that improve the world and families that relish life. Isn’t it possible that children, like adults, welcomed Jordan’s arrival not because he is a role model but because he’s a lot of fun to watch?

It’s hard to go more than a few days without hearing some adult announce

that a school, government or company is doing something for The Children. But so many of these announcements are based on ideas about children that simply don’t make sense.

The past couple of years have been a rough time for everyone, yet we hear endlessly about how traumatized children are by war, terrorism, the sniper and so on. Yes, some children have been quite sad about the troubles in the world. But others prefer to go about their business, studying, playing, growing up. And still others think a lot about those troubles and handle them as well as any adult does.

Too many parents, teachers and other authority figures assume that children are far more fragile and delicate than they really are. The school I went to in New York City is considering telling its 9th and 10th graders that they can no longer walk off the campus during free hours or lunchtime because they’re not ready to be out on their own. One teacher who favors the change says kids can’t learn independence unless an adult is there to supervise them. Excuse me? That’s a recipe for extending dependence. The only way to build trust is with trust.

The other day, The Post reported that Montgomery County’s schools are changing their system for grading students, forcing every teacher to base grades only on exactly how well you’ve mastered each item in the curriculum—paying no attention to class participation, effort, improvement, or any other factor teachers normally use.

Here’s another case of adults bending over backward to make certain that every child is treated precisely the same. The assumption is that children can’t understand that different teachers have different personalities and different expectations, just like different parents or bosses or friends do in the adult world. The whole idea sells kids short.

A generation of parents who grew up with more freedom than anyone else had had in a century has turned around and adopted a stifling, confining approach to their own kids. That’s the nature of the pendulum of history; it swings back and forth. But it’s a dangerous path, because kids can handle much more than we’re letting them experience—but only if we let them take on their world.

Marc Fisher has worked at The Post since 1986. Before launching his column in April, 2000, Fisher served as The Post’s Special Reports Editor, editing and writing features and enterprise stories for the newspaper’s front page. In addition, Fisher’s column, “Potomac Confidential,” appeared in the Sunday Magazine.

Fisher is the author of *After the Wall: Germany, the Germans and the Burdens of History*, published in 1995 by Simon and Schuster. The

book is a reporter’s view of Germany after reunification, focusing on the country’s struggle with its history during a century of trauma and aggression. For four years Fisher as the Bonn and Berlin bureau chief of The Post, beginning with the dramatic events of autumn 1989.

After his return from Germany, Fisher wrote profiles, reportage, essays and criticism for The Post’s Style section. He also wrote the Post’s radio column, *The Listener*, and wrote regularly about jazz.

Parts of Speech at the Beginning

The first paragraph of a KidsPost story can tell you **who** the story is about, **what** happened, **where** the action took place, **when** it took place, **why** the action took place and **how** the event happened.

Other times, writers of ledes (another name for the first paragraph of newspaper stories) just want you to think about a place or object. You have to read more paragraphs to know the main topic.

Different parts of speech begin the lede. They help to bring variety to your writing. The lede that follows begins with a preposition that gives us information about time. After reading two prepositional phrases, you find out that "Fred Rogers" is the subject of the sentence. What four actions did Mr. Rogers do for 34 years?

For 34 years, without fail, Fred Rogers put on his sweater, changed into his sneakers, looked out from the TV screen and said to each small

child: "You're special."

("Remembering a Trusted TV 'Neighbor,'" Feb. 27, 2003)

Below are first paragraphs from KidsPost stories. Write in the left column the part of speech with which each lede begins. In The Washington Post find a lede of an article or column that begins with the same part of speech. Copy it in the right column.

Part of Speech	Example from KidsPost	Your Example
1.	Imagine living in a fancy hotel in New York City with your mother, your nanny, your dog and your turtle. That's what Eloise does. Of course, Eloise isn't real. She's a character in a series of popular books written in the 1950s by an actress and singer named Kay Thompson and illustrated by Hilary Knight. —"The Life of Eloise," April 23, 2003	
2.	You use it about five times a day, but you're not supposed to talk about it. If you do, it's usually with hushed tones and giggles. —"That Other Super Bowl," April 22, 2003	
3.	Every day, the two girls search the news about the war, looking for clues to something very, very important to them: their mother's future. —"Watching, Waiting, Wondering," April 10, 2003	
4.	Ted Johnson is a kid in allowance heaven. He gets \$20 a week. —"Money? Make Some Allowance," April 8, 2003	
5.	A bike-and-hike trail leading to the Capitol dome. Special "Mobile Police Vehicles" with DVD players, snacks and bean bag chairs to keep cops comfortable. Trash cans designed to work like gum-ball machines. (Watching litter go down, down, down would be so much fun, people would stop dropping things in the street.) —"Not as Easy as A-B-C," March 4, 2003	
6.	For years scientists have argued about how dinosaurs became birds and learned to fly. Did they run along the ground real fast, flapping their wings until they took off? Or did they climb into trees, spread their wings and glide? —"Scientists Try to Explain Dinosaurs' Link With Birds," Jan. 27, 2003	
7.	Years ago kids in the Washington area went through another version of Code Orange. It was called the Cuban Missile Crisis. —"Forty Years Ago, It Was Much Like Today," Feb. 20, 2003	

Take the Lede

The first paragraph of a news story is called the lede. The traditional news lede provides the reader with most, if not all, of the five Ws and one H of the story—who, what, where, when, why and how.

The ledes of news stories, editorials, columns and other feature stories are all important: Information is given, a setting is conveyed, an attitude is established or perspective is presented.

TRADITIONAL NEWS LEDE

BELJING, April 25 (Friday)—Police cordoned off 2,000 patients and medical staff members at two major Beijing hospitals Thursday and the government sent hundreds of students to a quarantine facility outside the capital, declaring it would isolate anyone who might be infected with the SARS virus.

—John Pomfret
“China Seals Hospitals to Fight SARS” April 25, 2003, A1

ALLUSION

President Bush resembles both the Little Red Hen and Aladdin as the war in Iraq subsides. He has baked a loaf of liberation and hope for that broken Arab country—with precious little help from presumed friends. To accomplish that, he rubbed the magic lamp of U.S. military technology and summoned a genie with powers to remake the world.

Fairy tales persist because they capture essential truths about the human condition.

—Jim Hoagland
“Wars Tailor Made”
April 27, 2003, B7

ANECDOTE

The lasting, even impacting impression from the NBA playoffs so far is not of Kevin Garnett exhorting his teammates from the bench during overtime, nor Tracy McGrady swooping toward the

basket, nor Allen Iverson dropping a double-nickel on the Hornets. It’s the unforgettable sight of Maurice Cheeks leaving his team’s bench Friday in Portland to put his arm around 13-year-old Natalie Gilbert as she stood at mid-court holding a microphone but having fumbled the words to our national anthem, all alone and visibly in despair.

—Michael Wilbon
“Cheeks Lends Harmony To 1st Round of Playoffs”
April 29, 2003, D1

ATMOSPHERE

Deep inside a decrepit Anacostia school building with a deadbolted front door, down the hall from the teacher bellowing, “Get your damn face out of his damn face,” beneath one of the Soviet-style wall posters that the District schools never seem to get enough of (“Competency Requires That Workers Are Able To Productively Use: Resources, Information, Interpersonal Skills ...”), despite every barrier to success you can imagine, there’s magic inside Mr. Bennett and Ms. Sanker’s Chess Club room.

—Marc Fisher
“Freed by Chess, Cornered by D.C. Priorities”
April 29, 2003, B1

CONTRAST

The 107th Congress is concluding a two-year run that lurched from high drama to dreary deadlock, from

Write a lede on the back of this paper. Then change the lede by beginning with a different part of speech or approach. Try different types of ledes several times until you have written a lede that grabs the reader and conveys an attitude appropriate for the content of your story.

These examples are from The Washington Post. Use them as models.

notable achievements to embarrassing failures. From a pinnacle of bipartisanship after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, it plunged into some of the fiercest partisan strife that Capitol Hill has seen in years.

—Helen Dewar
“107th Congress Sped, Then Sputtered”
October 20, 2002, A9

DELAYED LEDE

First we will mourn the brave and beautiful who fell out of the sky. Then, however, we will proceed to the usual post-catastrophe ritual: investigation and recrimination. We will search for the culprits. Some human agent will be hauled out to bear the blame. And we will search for the cause: flying foam, wing damage, insulating tiles, whatever—we will find it. But we will miss the point.

—Charles Krauthammer
“It’s Time to Dream Higher”
Feb. 4, 2003, A25

DESCRIPTION

EAST OF THE EUPHRATES RIVER, Iraq—Near the crest of the bridge across the Euphrates that Task Force 3-69 Armor of the 1st Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division seized yesterday afternoon was a body that lay twisted from its fall. He had been an old man—poor, not a regular soldier—judging from his clothes. He was lying on his back, not far from one of several burning skeletons

of the small trucks that Saddam Hussein's willing and unwilling irregulars employed. The tanks and Bradleys and Humvees and bulldozers and rocket launchers, and all the rest of the massive stuff that makes up the U.S. Army on the march, rumbled past him, pushing on.

—Michael Kelly
"Across the Euphrates"
 April 3, 2003, A23

EXAMPLE

In 1880, abolitionist and author Frederick Douglass lived at Cedar Hill, his house in Anacostia, with his first wife and four granddaughters. His census form listed his race as "mulatto," his age as 60 and his occupation as "U.S. Marshall," for which he is now less well known than for his speeches and books.

—D'Vera Cohn
*"Snapshots of Americans
 From 1880 Census"*
 October 24, 2002, B1

HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE/CONTEXT

Every powerful nation sustains itself with a historical narrative. Rome imagined a barbarian world panting for its embrace. The British and French chased colonial expansion while convinced of their civilizing mission. The United States reigns as the world's hyperpower, but believes itself a humble republic rising only reluctantly to war.

—Michael Powell
"How America Picks Its Fights"
 March 25, 2003, C1

HUMOR/ALLUSION

An old baseball joke: A manager says his team needs just two more players to become a pennant contender. But, he says, "The players are Ruth and Gehrig."

Iraq needs only four people to achieve post-Saddam Hussein success. Unfortunately they are George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall.

—George F. Will
*"Wanted in Iraq:
 A Few Good Founders"*
 April 24, 2003, A25

PUNCH

He always promised he'd be back.

—David Montgomery
"Bullets Shatter a Brother's Hopes"
 April 29, 2003, C1

QUESTION

WATERVILLE, Maine—I never thought the United States would need a Franco-American Anti-Defamation League. But who would have imagined that guilt of being French-by-association would become the stuff of McCarthyism-lite in 2003?

—E.J. Dionne Jr.
"Freedom-Fried Republicans"
 April 25, 2003, A23

QUOTATION

"His [tax plan] seems to go places where I'm not going to hear from my constituents."

With that oblique endorsement of tax increases on District businesses, freshman D.C. Council member Adrian Fenty, an up-and-coming lawmaker from Ward 4, gave voice to the politician's tax creed, as expressed by the famous former Senate Finance Committee chairman, Louisiana's Russell Long. The politician's guiding principle of tax reform, Long said, is: "Don't tax you, don't tax me. Tax that fellow behind the tree."

—Colbert King
*"How the District Can
 Save Lives and Money"*
 April 26, 2003, A25

REPRESENTATIVE/ANECDOTE

Most mornings, 4-year-old Dorian Cardenas Rios searches his family's tiny Langley Park apartment for scraps of paper and crayons to pack in his Scooby-Doo backpack, so desperate is he to go to preschool.

—Brigid Schulte
*"County Faces a Tough
 Call on Head Start"*
 April 26, 2003, A1

SUSPENDED INTEREST

She hadn't been back to China in 20 years, and she was intent on taking it all in: the shiny new gated suburbs, the big gulps of gritty smog, the familiar taste of tender stewed snake.

—Michael Laris
*"In N. Va., a Perilous
 Trip With a Chinese Virus"*
 April 20, 2003, A1

TIME

SEATTLE—One week before the midterm elections, American voters are distracted, anxious and unsure, driven to vote—or not—by a laundry list of issues without an overriding theme. And neither Republicans nor Democrats appear to be favored.

—William Booth and Dan Balz
*"Many Voters Wary
 as Crucial Election Nears"*
 October 29, 2002, A1



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

How to Write a Column

Columnists clearly present a point of view. They do this using facts, quotations and their own opinions. They can tell about the lives of other people or their own. Some use humor; some use serious examples. Columnists should make

readers laugh, cry, think and care.

Marc Fisher has been a Washington Post columnist since 2000. Use his responses to learn about writing a column.

Where do you get your ideas?

Columns are everywhere—in my daily life, in my kids’ conversations, in e-mails from readers, in hallway chats with Post reporters, in angry or pleasant calls from the people I write about.

How long does it take you to write a column?

It depends on the kind of column—columns that tell someone’s story or take a reader to a news scene usually take a couple of hours to write. Columns that consist mainly of my own argument might take the better part of a day. If I’m writing on deadline about something that happened that day, I can write the column in half an hour.

Do you do a lot of reporting for a column?

I try to get out of the building and report most of the columns—at least one a week. I strongly believe that no one can write a compelling column just sitting in a windowless office.

When you sit down to write a column, what’s the first thing you do?

I try to figure out everything I want to say before I type the first word. I often wake in the middle of the night to jot down phrases or ideas on a pad of paper I keep on my night table.

Does someone edit your columns?

My editor is Bob Barnes, the Post’s metropolitan editor, and his job is to read each column critically, looking for lapses in logic, sometimes asking me if I really want to say whatever foolish thing I’ve said. I used to edit columns when I was an assistant city editor, and I know it’s very hard, because the Post has a deep belief in letting each columnist say whatever he wants to, yet an editor always has a responsibility to help a writer make his point as clearly and efficiently as possible.

Do you feel that you must be “fair” in the sense of reflecting all sides of an argument or is it okay to just present your side?

Depends. If the column is about

something that I reported, something that has not been the subject of news coverage in the paper, then I feel obliged to present the basics of all arguments before I say my side. But if I’m writing about something that everyone’s heard about—say, war in Iraq, or the sniper—then I’m comfortable just presenting my own perspective.

When you were in school, was there a particular class or a particular teacher who helped you get where you are today?

I had the fortune to study with teachers in high school and college who loved the sound of language—Tek Young Lin, who taught me in 10th grade to listen to the contours of a speaker’s sentences; Daniel Seltzer, a professor who taught me the basic laws of human drama; and John McPhee, whose course was an intensive exercise in making each word count.

The great thing about writing a column is that I can let the news decide what I write about, or I can just follow my interests.



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

The Columnist Connection

By Michael Getler

Aside from delivering the news, newspapers need to connect with readers and communities. One traditional way to do this is to make sure reporters, and editors as well, get out into the city, go to the scene of events, circulate, talk to people other than those interviewed in offices, know what's on the minds of those for whom they write. This seems obvious. But I'm not sure how much of this goes on anymore in newsrooms where you can often find almost everything you need to produce a respectable story by sitting at your computer and punching in Web sites, research links and transcript providers and making a phone call or two.

The Post has a vast circulation area spanning the District and sizable chunks of Virginia and Maryland. So even with a 220-person Metro staff—roughly half of them reporters—that's a lot of ground to cover. And aside from the daily Metro section, that staff also puts out eight weekly Extra sections for the District and most of the surrounding counties and three Extras twice a week for the more-distant counties.

Lots of solid, bread-and-butter coverage is in the Metro section—cops, the courts, the schools, the budget and politics. And there have been a fair number of honors for big, thematic Metro and investigative staff projects—including three Pulitzer prizes in the past four years.

Yet what is interesting, at least from my observation post, is that what seems to connect with readers most

consistently, to touch their lives most and what prompts them to write to the paper are the columnists. Metro has a number of good columnists. But two—Courtland Milloy and Marc Fisher—along with Colbert King, a deputy editorial page editor whose Saturday column on the op-ed page frequently focuses on the city, strike me as special.

What their columns have in common is that they are heavily reportorial. The writers take us places that we—and often the newspaper—haven't been. They put us at the scene of things we are not likely to witness, introduce us to people we otherwise would never know and focus on small events that tell larger stories. They take us down alleys, into barber shops, inside church buildings that are for sale and to schoolyards where rival gangs paint murals on the walls. These pieces are often more intimate than the daily news coverage and make the region and city, in particular, seem somehow more alive.

King, for example, with a string of columns in March and April, managed a portrait of crime in the city with more resonance than one usually gets from daily newspaper stories. The columns drew hundreds of responses from citizens saying "Amen" and adding their own experiences. In mid-March, King pointed out that in the previous two weeks, 12 people had been murdered in Washington, more Americans than had been lost in the U.S. military's operation in Afghanistan. Early this month, he reminded us that 55 people had been killed this year, 8 percent more than

during the same period last year.

But homicides were not the real subject of his columns. Rather, it was the routine overlay of crime that affects so many lives and neighborhoods. "I would ask," King wrote, "what about the stray bullets, frightened neighbors, heartbroken survivors? Many of the crimes committed in our city today—robberies and assaults with deadly weapons—hardly ever get mentioned in the newspaper or on television and radio . . . because they are too common and because no one dies." King listed a sampling of such crimes during three days in April. Excluded from his list, he pointed out, "are reports of homicides, sexual assaults, auto thefts, burglaries, thefts from homes and cars of which the city has experienced hundreds" since the previous week.

This, King concludes, "is the kind of stuff . . . the mayor and the police chief would just as soon not see portrayed prominently in a newspaper. . . . But this is precisely what too many residents in our city have to live with."

The Post, of course, reports extensively on major crime, and the Extras have a comprehensive listing of all crimes every week. But King finds a way to present this issue in its broadest effect on daily life, in a way that connects with readers, the way good reporters do, even without the commentary.

This ombudsman's column was printed in The Washington Post, Sunday, April 28, 2002, B6.



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A Changing Community, A Changing Role

This was an eventful time period in the life of The Post and a historic one for our country.

Read about Watergate

➤ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/watergate/splash.html>

Watergate 30 Years Later

The Watergate investigation brought fame to The Washington Post and the reporting team of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. The duo unraveled a web of political spying and sabotage that had all the elements of a Hollywood saga. In the end, after 40 government officials were indicted and a president resigned, many would conclude that the system of checks and balances worked. Yet, the triangular relationship between public officials, the media and the public was altered forever. This site includes Post coverage, cartoons, documents and a quiz.

<http://www.watergate.info/>

➤ The Scandal That Brought Down Richard Nixon

This site, prepared by a teacher, has received recognition from Education World and Surfing the Net with Kids. Clearly divided into sections, including "The Burglary," "Nixon Reacts to Watergate," and "The Investigation."

Read Washington Post archived articles before reading All the Presidents Men, then watch the video.

Listen to the Watergate Tapes

➤ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/watergate/watergatefront.htm>

Watergate Tapes Online

A sampling of some of the best known "abuse of power" conversations. The summaries were composed by the staff of the Richard Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archives.

Read about President Richard M. Nixon

➤ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/rn37.html>

Richard M. Nixon

Presidential bio and highlights of his administration.

➤ <http://www.nixonfoundation.org/>
The Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace
Official Web site of the Nixon Presidential Library. Read the public papers or learn about current activities at the center.

Read about the Pentagon Papers

A federal court had enjoined the New York Times from printing the files. At the Post, Katharine Graham makes the final decision: "Okay. I say let's go. Let's publish." Citing national security, the Justice Department gets an injunction against further publication. A week later, the newspapers prevail in the U.S. Supreme Court.

In addition to the memoirs of Katharine Graham and Ben Bradlee, you might want to read *Secrets: A Memoir of Viet Nam and the Pentagon Papers*, Daniel Ellsberg.

For a more indepth study, go to The Nation Security Archives (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB48/>) to read The Pentagon Papers: Secrets, Lies and Audiotapes. Archival documents, Supreme Court briefs and opinions, White House conversations and excerpts from the memoirs of Nixon, Kissinger and Haldeman.

Washington Post Timeline

1963: After the death of Philip Graham, her husband, Katharine Meyer Graham becomes publisher of The Post. Under her leadership, the modern Washington Post is created.

1965: Benjamin C. Bradlee is hired as deputy managing editor. The first reporters he hired to join The Post were David Broder, Ward Just, Bart Rowen, Dick Harwood, Don Oberdorfer, George Wilson and Stanley Karnow.

1969: The first edition of the Style section is printed on Jan. 6. Style becomes a model for feature sections throughout the country.

1971: After obtaining portions of the Pentagon Papers, a top-secret government study of U.S. policy in Vietnam, Post editors and lawyer struggle whether to publish the contents. They published papers.

1972: The Post reports a break-in at the Democratic National Committee's Watergate headquarters. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein with skill and persistence follow the story. The Post keeps Watergate on the national agenda.

The Post moves to its sixth, and current, home at 1150 15th St. N.W.

1973: The Post wins the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service and David Broder wins one for his column on the American political scene.

1975: Striking pressmen vandalize The Post's pressroom, disabling or destroying all the presses. As a result, there is no paper on Oct. 2, and much-reduced editions for several weeks as The Post is forced to use alternative presses across the region. After five months, the striking pressmen are replaced.

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Finding One's Voice: Katharine Graham

In *Personal History*, her 1998 memoir, Katharine Graham wrote about becoming publisher of The Washington Post: "I had very little idea of what I was supposed to be doing, so I set out to learn. What I essentially did was to put one foot in front of the other, shut my eyes, and step off the edge." She took leadership when women were not corporate executives.

Graham is known for making the decision to publish the Pentagon Papers and for supporting her staff during The Post's Watergate coverage. Yet, Robert Kaiser, former managing editor, wrote that it was the Post pressman's strike that was "the biggest crisis of Mrs. Graham's career." Twelve years after she became publisher, she was confronting union practices, such as having too many printers on shifts and setting "bogus" type; some pressmen responded by vandalizing the pressroom. Nearly five months later, Graham's decision "became not only a victory over the pressmen but over her own sense of inadequacy as well," according to then editor Ben Bradlee.

Bob Woodward remembers being 29 and telling Mrs. Graham that he and Carl Bernstein "weren't sure anything like the full story [of the Nixon White House] would ever emerge." She responded, "Don't tell me never." It was clear that she expected them to "do better."

It was Katharine Graham's idea to have an ombudsman, to listen to the public and make the paper accountable to readers and standards. Post ombudsman Michael Getler



FILE PHOTO —THE WASHINGTON POST

Washington Post Company CEO Katharine Graham in 2000. Contrasts in Graham's management style and her moral authority surprised many in the newsroom.Av

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wrote, “Newspapers work best when there is a sense of drive, spirit and support, a culture that is aggressive yet accurate, fair and confident of what is put in front of readers. Mrs. Graham, in combination with a new editor, Ben Bradlee, whom she brought from Newsweek in 1965, made that possible. Together, they motivated and made shine a generation of journalists.”

The Washington Post’s foreign bureaus grew. Graham interviewed world leaders and entertained wealthy and important people in her home.

But there was more to Mrs. Graham.

Marc Fisher concluded in “Katharine Graham Never Lost Sight of Her City,” a memorial column printed on July 18, 2001:

Mrs. Graham was so modest in manner that even hardened reporters were awed by her occasional ripping displays of moral authority. When Chinese security agents searched Post correspondent Lena Sun’s office in Beijing in 1992, confiscating her personal papers, Mrs. Graham went to the Chinese Embassy on Connecticut Avenue on a Sunday in her pearls and banged on the door until someone would see her.

She was not a fiery speaker, and until she wrote her book—in her own hand on long yellow pads—she hadn’t written much. She spoke with her newspaper—sending reporters around the region, nation and globe, not because it made money, but because it is what a newspaper is supposed to do. She spoke with her money—breathing life into many of Washington’s theaters, musical groups and museums, great and small. She spoke with her presence—of all the events The Post sponsored, Mrs.

Graham never missed the awards for superb teachers.

Most essentially, she spoke with her decency. Ike Fulwood, Washington’s chief of police a few years back, saw grace in Mrs. Graham. “Here was a woman who had made decisions about the Pentagon Papers, about Watergate, but she always had this passion about what happened to the children in this city,” he said.

“This was her city and she wanted it to be a good place,” said Maurice Sykes, the former deputy school superintendent who worked with Mrs. Graham when she raised money for an early childhood center in Southeast. “With all the wealth and all the power, she could relate to those children on Stanton Road. She was compelled by the disparity in resources.”

Once, investigative reporter Sari Horwitz ran into Mrs. Graham in front of the Post building. “She stopped me and asked what I was working on,” Horwitz recalls, “and I wasn’t even sure she knew who I was.” Horwitz told her about her reporting following up on the brutal death of foster child Brianna Blackmond. Mrs. Graham said: “You know, that’s very important. Stories about children are really very important to me.”

And the woman who met with kings and weekended with presidents and socialized with princesses offered to give the city reporter a lift, because for all her stature, what she really cared about was the city her paper covered, the children who could not do for themselves, the minds and hearts that needed a boost. Katharine Graham’s legacy is not the power she wielded or the company she built so much as the

stories that will appear in these pages next week and next month and next year, stories that open eyes, right wrongs and teach us all.

To learn more about Katharine Graham, read *Personal History* and visit <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/metro/specials/graham/index.htm>

Katharine Graham Remembered (1917-2001)

This collection provides a moving and informative tribute to a newspaperwoman, publisher and president of The Washington Post Company. Appreciations expressed in The Post, Newsweek and live online. Hear her in her own words, excerpts from *Personal History*. View video eulogies and audio memories.



FILE PHOTO —THE WASHINGTON

Katharine Graham, chairman of the board of the Washington Post Company, poses at a party with author Truman Copote.



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YOU and YOUR RIGHTS

Religious Freedom and Tolerance

School prayer is one of the most hotly debated issues today. Ever since 1962, when the Supreme Court decided a case called *Engel v. Vitale*, people have voiced strong opinions about the Court's interpretation of the separation of church and state. In that case, the Court decided that organized prayer in the nation's public schools was not allowed because it meant that school officials were promoting one religion over another. In another recent case, the Supreme Court decided that students may run religious clubs after schools that include reading the Bible, as long as school officials are not promoting that student group to the detriment of others.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees that all Americans not only have the right to freely exercise their religious beliefs but also the right to be free from establishment of religion by the government. The First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Freedom to exercise religion means that no matter what religion you practice, the government (including public schools) cannot stop you from practicing your religion. For

example, if a Muslim student wants to pray during the school day, the school must allow him to do so and must provide him with the appropriate space. This freedom to practice religion is one of the most fundamental freedoms that Americans enjoy. Freedom of religion was one of the most important values to the Founders of the United States of America.

In fact, the American government and people feel so strongly about the right of people to practice whatever religion they choose that we have been willing to go to war to promote this most basic tenet of democracy. One of the reasons our country is engaged in a war with Iraq is to create a more open society in which citizens are not forced to wear, act or believe exactly what the government dictates. For example, in some Islamic countries, women are required to wear hijab, loose clothing topped by a type of scarf worn around the head and under the chin.

Even though many people understand and value this freedom, some Americans feel threatened and act out against those whose religious views differ from their own. For example, especially since September 11, 2001, many Arab and Muslim students have been the target of hateful slurs and violence from fellow students and even some teachers. Hate often stems from ignorance. The more we learn about one another's differences, the more we can understand and appreciate each other.

Tolerance for Others

For more information on world religions and tolerance, check out the following Web sites and books.

On the Web

www.tolerance.org

Tolerance

Southern Poverty Law Center maintains a Web site where children can read and listen to stories, create a mural, and explore (<http://www.tolerance.org/pt/>), and parents and teachers can find informative articles on teaching tolerance to (http://www.tolerance.org/tol_at_home/).

In Print

Sara Bullard. *Teaching Tolerance: Raising Open-Minded, Empathetic Children.*

Stanley Koehler. *Tolerance 101: Practical Solutions to Interfaith Family Problems.*

Marilyn McFarlane. *Sacred Myths: Stories of World Religions.*

Mary Pope Osborne. *One World, Many Religions: The Ways We Worship.*

Peggy Fletcher Stack. *A World of Faith.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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YOU and YOUR RIGHTS

Religious Freedom and Tolerance

CASE STUDY: ISLAMIC DRESS FOR WOMEN

Most Muslim women today do not wear a full face veil. It is more common to see women in hijab, which literally means “curtain” in Arabic. Hijab is the generic term for the dress code. Women don’t share a common style nor have the same reasons for wearing hijab. For many it reflects the belief that they are following God’s commandments, are dressing according to “the correct standard of modesty,” or simply are wearing the type of traditional clothes they feel comfortable in.

Hijab is the generic term for the dress code, and burqa is the head-to-toe covering that consists of a long, shapeless robe and a veil that covers the hair and face with only a small slit for the eyes. Hijab takes various forms in different Islamic countries. The Koran, which is the religious text followed by Muslims, does not specify what kind of clothing would or would not be considered proper hijab. Some modern Islamic scholars describe hijab as a code of dress stipulating that everything but the women’s hands and face be covered. To comply with the code, some Muslim women wear a chador, an outfit that includes a long, loose robe and a veil covering the hair but not necessarily the face. Many Muslim women in America adapt these items to a Western



FILE PHOTO BY FRANK JOHNSTON —THE WASHINGTON POST

Enaas Sarsour, 17, of Falls Church at her family home. Shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, Sarsour was stopped by a male security guard at BWI Airport and asked to remove her head scarf in public, which goes against her religious beliefs.

environment by wearing, for example, running shoes, jeans, a sweatshirt and a headscarf.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Interview one student, neighbor, or a friend, who has different religious views than you do. For example, if you are a Catholic, find a Jewish classmate to interview. Ask them the following questions and bring the results to class so that you can share them with your classmates:

1. What religion, if any, do you

follow?

2. What holidays are important in your religion?
3. What is your favorite religious holiday? Why?
4. Does your religion have any symbols or symbolic acts?
5. Do you wear any special clothes, jewelry, or symbols that identify you as a member of your religious group?
6. Do you wear any of these items to school?

YOU and YOUR RIGHTS

The Marshall-Brennan Fellowship Program at American University’s Washington College of Law trains upper-level law students to teach a course on constitutional rights and responsibilities to hundreds of students in Washington, D.C. area public high schools. For more information about the program, please contact Michelle Carhart, program coordinator, at mcarhart@wcl.american.edu. For curricular information or information on how to get involved, please contact Maryam Ahranjani, academic coordinator, at mahrnjani@wcl.american.edu.

