

Letters to the Editor

What are they?

Letters to the editor (LTE's) most often discuss a recent event or issue covered by a publication, radio station, or TV program. Widely read, LTE's are your chance to "sound-off" to your community about issues in the news.

Elements / Hints

- It is much easier to publish a letter to the editor than it is to place an op-ed
- Your letter has the best chance of being published if it is a reaction to a story in the paper. Respond as quickly as you can.
- Read the letters page—you will learn how to develop an effective letter-writing style, and you will see if someone has already responded with your idea.
- Keep it short and concise—150-200 words. The paper will take the liberty to shorten your letter to suit its format; the more it has to cut, the less control you have of what gets printed. Lead with your most important information.
- Focus on one main point and make a compelling case.
- Write in short paragraphs, with no more than three sentences per paragraph.
- Don't write too often. Once every three months is about as often as you should write.
- Avoid personal attacks.
- Put your full name at the bottom, and include a phone number for verification purposes.
- Follow up to see if the letter was received.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

[Intro sentence connecting your letter to a recent article, if applicable]. This weekend, November 16-18, I will join thousands in Columbus, Georgia to call for the closure of the controversial School of the Americas, renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/ WHINSEC). Graduates of this U.S.-taxpayer-financed institution, a combat training school for Latin American security personnel, continue to be implicated in civilian-targeted killings throughout Latin America.

The SOA/ WHINSEC, a combat training facility for Latin American security personnel located at Fort Benning, Georgia, made headlines in 1996 when the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion and execution. Despite this shocking admission and hundreds of documented human rights abuses connected to soldiers trained at the school, no independent investigation into the training facility has ever taken place.

For hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans, this school is a symbol of torture and failed U.S foreign policy. It is out of line with the values of everyday Americans, and closing it for good would send a strong human rights record to Latin America and the world.

A growing movement of human rights groups, religious clergy and laypeople, students, veterans, unionists and many others will converge in Georgia this weekend, including a contingent from *[your town]*. We will demand that this training camp be shut down. The path to lasting peace and security can only be found if we implement foreign policy that reflects our ideals of justice and democracy.

To learn more about the SOA/WHINSEC and efforts to close it, visit www.SOAW.org or call 202-234-3440.

Sincerely,
[your name, address and contact info]