

# ***Duke University Writing Studio E-News***

## ***Volume 2, Issue 7, April 2008***

The E-News is a monthly newsletter featuring writing-related questions and upcoming events at the Writing Studio. For more information about the Writing Studio, visit our Web site at <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>. Appointments with writing tutors can be reserved in advance online.

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### ■ **Event of the Month: Poem in Your Pocket Day**

Did you know that April is National Poetry Month? Since 2002, New York City has celebrated National Poetry Month with "Poem in Your Pocket Day," a day when people are encouraged to carry poetry with them, to enjoy and to share with others. This year, the Writing Studio and the Friends of Duke Library are teaming up to celebrate the first national Poem in Your Pocket Day on April 17. Bookmarks featuring pocket-sized poems will be placed at various on-campus locations, including library circulation desks, Writing Studio spaces, and the Gothic Bookstore. For more information, check out the American Academy of Poets Web site at <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/406>. This month, and especially on April 17, we hope you will take a poem, and pass it along. You might rediscover an old favorite or find new inspiration!

### ■ **Quick Tips Available at Pop-In Mini-Sessions: Drop in or Call 684-6796**

**When:** 4 – 7 p.m. on Wed. Apr. 23, Thurs. Apr. 24, Mon. Apr. 28 & Tues. Apr. 29

**Where:** 112 Perkins (West) and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Lilly (East)

**Why:** To get fast answers to last-minute questions!

**Scenario:** It's 4:30 in the afternoon. Your final paper is due at 5:00 sharp, hard-copy, in the TA's hands—no exceptions. Every hair on your head points in a unique direction. You haven't slept in two days, you're on your sixth Red Bull, and you can't remember how to cite a quote within a quote. "But this paper has to be perfect!" you remind yourself; it's 50% of your final grade. What do you do now!?

**Or you have other questions:**

- You need formatting help with your Works Cited page
- You have a grammar question
- You want a quick response to an already heavily revised paragraph
- Etc.

**Solution:** If it's **April 23, 24, 28 or 29**, between the hours of **4 and 7 p.m.**, head to the Duke University Writing Studio! We have resources for you: style and grammar handbooks, resource handouts, and helpful and experienced tutors—all available to you on a first-come, first-served basis in both Perkins and Lilly libraries. Drop in or call **684-6796** with your quick question(s). No appointment necessary.

■ **Hints for Making Appointments during the Writing Studio's "Busy Season"**

As the end of the semester draws near, students often reserve Writing Studio appointment slots well in advance. With busy schedules and various commitments, though, cancellations and no-shows inevitably occur. We strongly encourage students who need to cancel an appointment to do so well in advance, whenever possible.

If, however, you need an appointment and find the appointment calendar booked, try one of the following strategies. First, check the appointment calendar frequently for newly available appointments to appear due to cancellations. We see many appointments slots fluctuate throughout the day due to cancellations and rescheduling, so opportunities to snag previously booked appointments are not uncommon. Second, you can also try for a walk-in appointment. Stop by one of the Studio locations just after the top of any hour (during regular Studio hours) and wait to see if a scheduled appointment fails to arrive or cancels at the last minute.

■ **"Celebrating the Semicolon in a Most Unlikely Location," by Sam Roberts**

According to Sam Roberts's recent article in *The New York Times*,

It was nearly hidden on a New York City Transit public service placard exhorting subway riders not to leave their newspaper behind when they get off the train. "Please put it in a trash can," riders are reminded. After which Neil Neches, an erudite writer in the transit agency's marketing and service information department, inserted a semicolon. The rest of the sentence reads, "that's good news for everyone."

Semicolon sightings in the city are unusual, period, much less in exhortations drafted by committees of civil servants. In literature and journalism, not to mention in advertising, the semicolon has been largely jettisoned as a pretentious anachronism. Americans, in particular, prefer shorter sentences without ... distinct division between statements that are closely related but require a separation more prolonged than a conjunction and more emphatic than a comma.

In terms of punctuation, semicolons signal something New Yorkers rarely do. Frank McCourt, the writer and former English teacher at Stuyvesant High School, describes the semicolon as the yellow traffic light of a “New York sentence.” In response, most New Yorkers accelerate; they don’t pause to contemplate.

Semicolons are supposed to be introduced into the curriculum of the New York City public schools in the third grade. That is where Mr. Neches, the 55-year-old New York City Transit marketing manager, learned them, before graduating from Tilden High School and Brooklyn College, where he majored in English and later received a master’s degree in creative writing.

But, whatever one’s personal feelings about semicolons, some people don’t use them because they never learned how. In fact, when Mr. Neches was informed by a supervisor that a reporter was inquiring about who was responsible for the semicolon, he was concerned. “I thought at first somebody was complaining,” he said.

Louis Menand, an English professor at Harvard and a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, pronounced the subway poster’s use of the semicolon to be “impeccable.” Lynne Truss, author of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, called it a “lovely example” of proper punctuation. Geoffrey Nunberg, a professor of linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, praised the “burgeoning of punctuational literacy in unlikely places.” Allan M. Siegal, a longtime arbiter of *New York Times* style before retiring, opined, “The semicolon is correct, though I’d have used a colon, which I think would be a bit more sophisticated in that sentence.”

New York City Transit’s unintended agenda notwithstanding, e-mail messages and text-messaging may jeopardize the last vestiges of semicolons. They still live on, though, in emoticons, those graphic emblems of our grins, grimaces and other facial expressions. The semicolon, befittingly, symbolizes a wink.

Source: “Celebrating the Semicolon in a Most Unlikely Location,” by Sam Roberts. *New York Times* online, Feb 18, 2008. Full story available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/nyregion/18semicolon.html?ex=1204174800&en=8c1052785bfeb929&ei=5070&emc=eta1>

### ■ Summer Tutoring at the Writing Studio

This summer, the Writing Studio is open for business. Whether you’re on campus, in your hometown, or traveling the world, we’ll be here to help you with any kind of writing—academic writing, application essays, cover letters, creative projects, you name it—at any stage of the writing process.

Tutors will be on duty during both summer sessions, from the time classes begin through the end of exams, providing the same expertise and perspective students expect during the regular school term. Both face-to-face and E-Tutor appointments are available, and drop-in appointments are welcome during our limited summer hours. Since summer courses move at a

rapid pace, students are encouraged to sign up for an appointment as soon as writing assignments are given. You may also want to consider a writing tutor's advice for personal statements and summer creative writing projects.

Not in Durham this summer? The Writing Studio can still help with your writing projects. Our E-Tutor service allows you to sign up for an appointment, submit a draft, and receive prompt feedback online, no matter where the summer finds you. If you haven't had occasion to try out E-Tutor yet, this summer may be the perfect opportunity. More information about this service is available at <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/schedule/etutorfaqs.html>.

## ■ Upcoming Workshops and Writing Group Schedule

### APRIL WORKSHOPS

Editing for Clarity and Proofreading for Correctness (Tues. Apr. 1, 2 p.m. 112 Perkins Library or Thurs. Apr. 3, 9 p.m. Lilly Library Training Room)

Improving Your Writing Style: Clarity, Conciseness, Cohesion, and Coherence (Tues. Apr. 8, 2 p.m. 112 Perkins Library or Thurs. Apr. 10, 9 p.m. Lilly Library Training Room)

Check the Web site on the Workshop/Group Sign-Up page for updated dates, times, and locations: <http://aaswebsv.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/calendar/writing.pl?option=4>.

### WRITING GROUPS

**CREATIVE WRITING:** Contact Facilitator: Rod Frey ([rlf5@duke.edu](mailto:rlf5@duke.edu))

**SCI FI/FANTASY:** Contact Facilitator: Jen Welsh ([jlw23@duke.edu](mailto:jlw23@duke.edu))

**DISSERTATION GROUP:** Contact Facilitator: Richard Musselwhite ([rmusselw@duke.edu](mailto:rmusselw@duke.edu))

## ■ Quotation of the Month

“A word is a bud attempting to become a twig. How can one not dream while writing? It is the pen which dreams. The blank page gives the right to dream.”

- Gaston Bachelard

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