

WS Newsletter – Vol. 3, Issue 3, April 2009

The WS monthly newsletter features writing-related questions and upcoming events at the Writing Studio. Appointments with writing tutors can be reserved in advance online. For more information about the Writing Studio, please visit our website listed above.

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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, enjoy it for themselves, and share it with others. Once again this year, the Writing Studio and the Friends of Duke Library are teaming up to celebrate the second national Poem in Your Pocket Day on **Thursday, April 30**. 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 website at <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/406>. This month, and especially on April 30, we hope you will take a poem and pass it along. You might rediscover an old favorite, or you may find new inspiration!

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

- When:** 4 – 7 p.m. on Sunday, April 26
Where: 112 Perkins (West) and Trinity Café (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 *Jolt cola*, 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
- Etcetera...

Solution: If it's **April 26**, between the hours of **4 – 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 from on a first-come, first-serve basis in both 112 Perkins and Trinity Cafe. Drop in or call **684-6796** with your quick question(s). No appointment necessary.

Also, tutors are available every Sunday – Thursday evening from 9 p.m. to midnight at the Virtual Studio for quick questions. Email virtualstudio@duke.edu for a Qwaq download invitation.

■ Hints for Making Appointments during the 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, cancellations and no-shows inevitably occur. We strongly encourage students who need to cancel an appointment to do so well in advance, whenever possible.

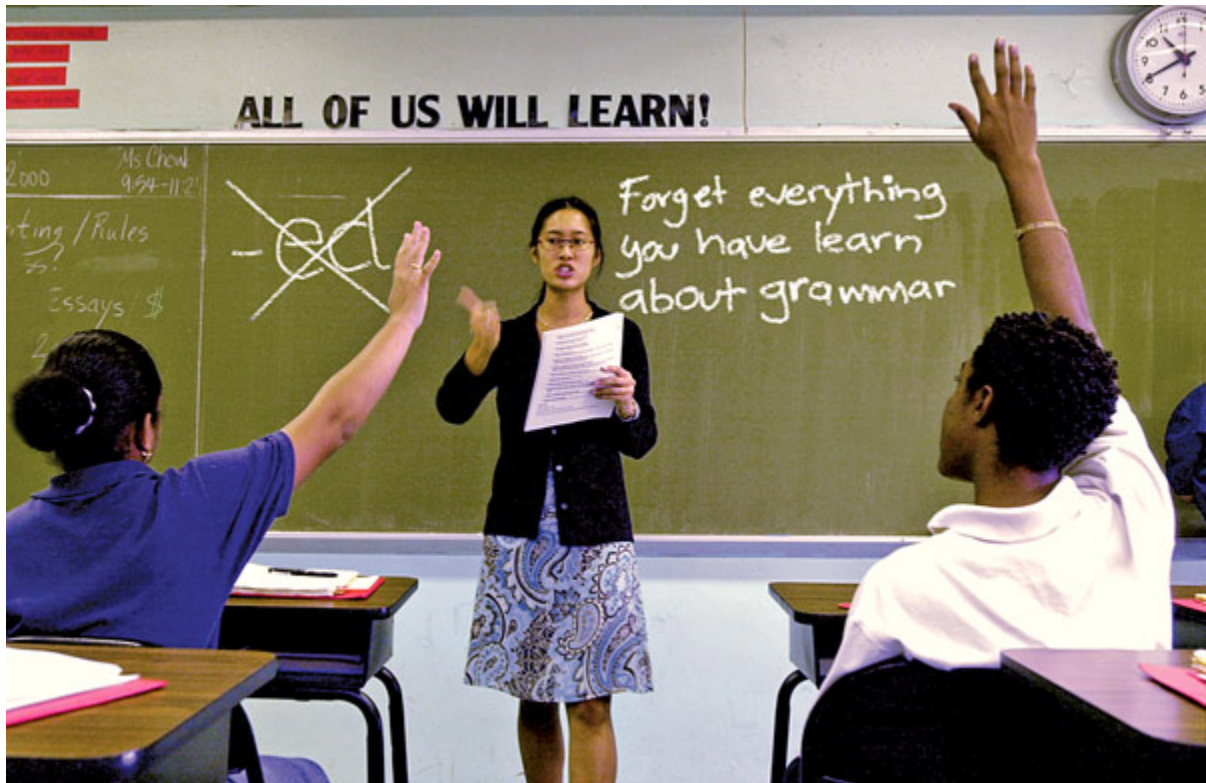
If you need an appointment and find the appointment calendar booked, try one of the following strategies. First, check the appointment calendar frequently for newly available appointments to appear, due to cancellations. We see many appointments slots fluctuate throughout the day, so opportunities to 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.

■ Just for Fun: Underfunded Schools Forced to Cut Past Tense from Language Programs

Education Correspondent
The Onion

WASHINGTON — Faced with ongoing budget crises, underfunded schools nationwide are

increasingly left with no option but to cut the past tense — a grammatical construction traditionally used to relate all actions, and states that have transpired at an earlier point in time — from their standard English and language arts programs.



A Chicago-area teacher begins the new past-tense-free curriculum

A part of American school curricula for more than 200 years, the past tense was deemed by school administrators to be too expensive to keep in primary and secondary education.

“This was by no means an easy decision, but teaching our students how to conjugate verbs in a way that would allow them to describe events that have already occurred is a luxury that we can no longer afford,” Phoenix-area high school principal Sam Pennock said. “With our current budget, the past tense must unfortunately become a thing of the past.”

In the most dramatic display of the new trend yet, the Tennessee Department of Education decided Monday to remove “-ed” endings from all of the state’s English classrooms, saving struggling schools an estimated \$3 million each year. Officials say they plan to slowly phase out the tense by first eliminating the past perfect; once students have adjusted to the change, the past, the past continuous, the past perfect progressive, and the simple past will be cut. Hundreds of school districts across the country are expected to follow suit.

“This is the end of an era,” said Alicia Reynolds, a school district director in Tuscaloosa, AL. “For some, reading and writing about things not immediately taking place was almost as much a part of school as history class and social studies.”

“That is, until we were forced to drop history and social studies classes a couple of months ago,” Reynolds added.

Nevertheless, a number of educators are coming out against the cuts, claiming that the embattled verb tense, while outmoded, still plays an important role in the development of today’s youth.

“Much like art and music, the past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression,” South Boston English teacher David Floen said. “Without it I fear many of our students will lack a number of important creative skills. Like being able to describe anything that happened earlier in the day.”

Despite concerns that cutting the past tense will prevent communicating effectively in the workplace, the home, the grocery store, church, and various other public spaces, a number of lawmakers, such as Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, have welcomed the cuts as proof that the American school system is taking a more forward-thinking approach to education.

“Our tax dollars should be spent preparing our children for the future, not for what has already happened,” Hatch said at a recent press conference. “It’s about time we stopped wasting everyone’s time with who ‘did’ what or ‘went’ where. The past tense is, by definition, outdated.” Said Hatch, “I can’t even remember the last time I had to use it.”

Past tense instruction is only the latest school program to face the chopping block. School districts in California have been forced to cut addition and subtraction from their math departments, while nearly all high schools have reduced foreign language courses to only the most basic phrases, including “May I please use the bathroom?” and “No, I do not want to go to the beach with Maria and Juan.” Some legislators are even calling for an end to teaching grammar itself, saying that in many inner-city school districts, where funding is most lacking, students rarely use grammar at all.

Regardless of the recent upheaval, students throughout the country are learning to accept, and even embrace, the change to their curriculum.

“At first I think the decision to drop the past tense from class is ridiculous, and I feel very upset by it,” said David Keller, a seventh-grade student at Hampstead School in Fort Meyers, FL. “But now, it’s almost like it never happens.”

Reprinted from The Onion: America’s Finest “News” Source, Nov. 30, 2007
http://www.theonion.com/content/news/underfunded_schools_forced_to_cut

■ April Workshops

Editing for Clarity and Proofreading for Correctness
(Thursday, April 2, 2 p.m., 112 Perkins Library)

Academic and Professional E-Mail

(Thursday, April 9, 2 p.m., 112 Perkins Library)

Check the website 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

Send us an email to sign up for a group you're interested in. We will e-mail you and coordinate a possible date, time, and number of meetings with other interested students.

Creative Writing: Email us at wstudio@duke.edu.

A group for students interested in writing fiction, creative non-fiction, or poetry, sharing work with and receiving inspiration from others, and offering/receiving constructive criticism in a friendly, supportive environment. Bring ideas, works in progress, and a readiness to both listen and talk.

Sci-Fi / Fantasy: Email us at wstudio@duke.edu.

If you are interested in meeting on a weekly basis with other students who are also interested in writing science fiction and/or fantasy, this is the group for you.

■ Grammar Tip of the Month: Tricky Verb Conjugations

The simple past tense doesn't usually pose much of a challenge for us professional wordsmiths. Today I walk; yesterday I walked. Nothing to it.

But sometimes we stumble over the past tense of so-called strong (or irregular) verbs, like **shrink** or **spring** — the kind that don't simply use "ed" at the end. (For more on strong verbs, including a fairy-tale connection, see [this note](#) in the *Columbia Guide to Standard American English*.)

Dictionaries often give two choices for the past tense of these verbs. For consistency, we should always use the first choice listed in our preferred dictionary (*Webster's New World College*). So the simple past tense of "shrink" should be "shrank," not "shrunk." For "spring," use "sprang," not "sprung." (The forms with the "u" are used for the past participle: **it shrinks, it shrank, it has shrunk**.)

We've had a number of recent lapses:

*If you can illustrate that your income is no longer enough to meet your mortgage payment — because your paycheck **shrunk**, your expenses rose or your mortgage is about to reset to a higher payment — you may qualify.*

Make it "shrank" (or "has shrunk" and "have risen").

•••

*If a man had broken the [Alex Rodriguez] steroid story, would he have been demonized as a social deviant when all he was doing was due diligence? Would he have been subjected to a cross-examination of his intentions and ethics by too many in the news media and slandered by one WFAN morning radio host, whose recent misogynist ravings **sunk** to the level of his departed predecessor?*

Make it “sank.”

•••

*President Obama on Monday evening became the 10th American president to call on Helen Thomas at a White House news conference. And he was the first to call on Sam Stein, a reporter for The Huffington Post, whose Internet publication **sprung** to life during Mr. Obama’s candidacy.*

Make it “sprang.”

•••

*After being told of the many errors, he said several times that he **strived** to recollect events six years afterward.*

Make it “strove.” (Better still, “was striving,” or even better, “was trying.”)

•••

*Instead of getting grumpy with himself, as he might have in the past, Ogilvy **grinded** out an improbable par with a long chip-in to win the hole.*

Make it “ground.”

Everyone struggles at one time or another with these tricky verb conjugations. Remember, just because you frequently hear people using them one way doesn’t mean that it’s correct!

**“I want to be out there on the firing line,
helping, directing, or doing something to try to
make this a better world, a better place to live.”
– John Hope Franklin**

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