

WS Newsletter – Vol. 3, Issue 1 – February 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.

In this issue:

- **Event of the Month: Make Your Own Valentine**
 - **Announcement: The Writing Studio Goes Virtual!**
 - **Just for Fun: My Five-Paragraph Theme**
 - **Upcoming Workshops**
 - **Writing Groups**
 - **Quotation of the Month**
-

■ **Event of the Month: Make Your Own Valentine**

Still searching for that perfect phrase for your valentine? February 14 has long been an occasion for writer's block, so the Writing Studio has collected some famous romantic lines from literature and pop culture to help you out. We'll provide the materials and the inspiration for you to create a handmade card for that special friend or romantic interest in your life.

The Writing Studio will host the second annual **Valentine's Day Workshop in 112 Perkins Library on Thursday, February 12 from 4 -7 p.m.** This event is in celebration of International Writing Center Week.

■ **Announcement: The Writing Studio Goes Virtual!**

On **February 16 from 9 p.m. to midnight**, we invite you to the grand opening of the "Virtual Writing Studio"—staffed with tutor avatars and stocked with virtual refreshments. Drop in and take a look around this exciting, interactive environment. Please free to explore the "Virtual Writing Studio" on your own or during the staffed hours.

The program provides two types of interactions:

1. **Engage with a tutor** in a virtual space designed specifically for quick writing questions. Whether it's help with an opening paragraph, citing a source, or simply

getting started, a tutor will be there to help out **Sundays through Thursdays from 7 p.m. to midnight**. During these times, a tutor will greet you when you first arrive, show you around the space, and help you with any quick writing questions you might have.

2. **Meet fellow writers** to share and comment on individual writing projects or to collaborate on group writing projects in a private space. Meeting online offers the ultimate flexibility in terms of scheduling: a 24/7 meeting space for writing projects.

After we start up on February 16, you can simply go to the Writing Studio website, select “Virtual Writing Studio” from the home page, read the informational page, and follow instructions on how to download the *Qwaq* virtual world software. We’re looking forward to continuing this conversation virtually!

■ Just for Fun: “My Five-Paragraph Theme” by Edward M. White

Since the beginning of time, some college teachers have mocked the five-paragraph theme. But I intend to show that they have been mistaken. There are three reasons why I always write five-paragraph themes. First, it gives me an organizational scheme: an introduction (like this one) setting out three subtopics, three paragraphs for my three subtopics, and a concluding paragraph reminding you what I have said, in case you weren't paying attention. Second, it focuses my topic, so I don't just go on and on when I don't have anything much to say. Three and only three subtopics force me to think in a limited way. And third, it lets me write pretty much the same essay on anything at all. So I do pretty well on essay tests. A lot of teachers actually like the five-paragraph theme as much as I do.

The first reason I always write five-paragraph themes is that it gives me an organizational scheme. It doesn't matter what the subject is, since there are three parts to everything you can think of. If you can't think of more than two, you just have to think harder or come up with something that might fit. An example will often work, like the three causes of the Civil War or abortion or reasons why the ridiculous twenty-one-year-old limit for drinking alcohol should be abolished. A worse problem is when you wind up with more than three subtopics, since sometimes you want to talk about all of them. But you can't. You have to pick the best three. That keeps you from thinking too much, which is a great time saver, especially on an essay test.

The second reason for the five-paragraph theme is that it makes you focus on a single topic. Some people start writing on the usual topic, like TV commercials, and they wind up all over the place, talking about where TV came from or capitalism or health foods or whatever. But with only five paragraphs and one topic you're not tempted to get beyond your original idea, like commercials are a good source of information about products. You give your three examples, and zap! you're done. This is another way the five-paragraph theme keeps you from thinking too much.

The last reason to write this way is the most important. Once you have it down, you can use it

for practically anything. Does God exist? Well, you can say yes and give three reasons, or no and give three different reasons. It doesn't really matter. You're sure to get a good grade whatever you pick to put into the formula. And that's the real reason for education, to get those good grades without thinking too much and using up too much time.

So I've given you three reasons why I always write a five-paragraph theme and why I'll keep doing so in college. It gives me an organizational scheme that looks like an essay, it limits my focus to one topic and three subtopics so I don't wander about thinking irrelevant thoughts, and it will be useful for whatever writing I do in any subject. I don't know why some teachers seem to dislike it so much. They must have a different idea about education than I do.

– Edward M. White, reprinted from *College Composition and Communication* 59:3
(Feb 2008): 524-526.

■ February Workshops

Making an Academic Argument

(Thurs. Feb. 5, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library)

Organizing a Research Project

(Thurs. Feb. 12, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library)

Getting In: Application Essays for Graduate and Professional Schools, Internships, and Special Programs

(Thurs. Feb. 19, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library)

U.S. Academic Writing: Considerations for Non-Native English Speakers

(Thurs. Feb. 26, 2 pm, 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 at wstudio@duke.edu 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. Encourage your friends and classmates to sign up, as we need a minimum of three to schedule a writing group.

Creative Writing:

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:

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

**“Put it before them briefly so they will read it,
clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely
so they will remember it and, above all,
accurately so they will be guided by its light.”
– Joseph Pulitzer**

To unsubscribe from the DWS listserv, log into the Duke Mailing List Manager at <https://lists.duke.edu/sympa>, then select “Writing Studio” and “unsubscribe.”