

WS Newsletter – Vol. 3, Issue 2, March 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: Join Us for the Virtual Studio “QWAQ-In” Grand Opening on March 2

Join us Monday night, March 2, from 9 PM to midnight as we celebrate the Grand Opening of the virtual Writing Studio at Duke University. For the rest of the semester, tutors will staff the Virtual Studio on Sunday – Thursday evenings from 9 PM to midnight and be available for virtual tours and quick questions. During unstaffed hours, you are free to explore the space on your own.

In addition to face-to-face tutoring, E-Tutor appointments, and weekly writing workshops, the Writing Studio will now be available in an exciting, interactive, and immersive environment for quick writing questions. The virtual WS operates within QWAQ, a program that generates virtual world environments complete with minimalist avatars to support individual and collaborative writing experiences in a virtual space. The Duke Writing Studio continues to explore innovative ways of increasing access points for Duke students seeking feedback on their writing. This virtual space provides a range of applications, including internet feeds, message boards, and Microsoft Open Office, which allows multiple users to access and change a document simultaneously.

To access the virtual WS, you will first need to download the QWAQ forum application onto your personal computer. To receive instructions for downloading the software, email virtualstudio@duke.edu with “Invitation” and your Duke net ID in the subject line. This information is also available on the WS web site. Thanks, and we look forward to seeing you there: VIRTUALLY!

■ Avoid the Apostrophe Apocalypse: A Survey of Recent Books on Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation

The following article was originally posted by “Chelsea” at the Flavorwire Blog Archive:



“Written English is in danger, but not necessarily for the reasons you assume. Warring parties of grammarians, teachers, literacy activists, and politicians are addressing widespread linguistic changes by debating the risks and rewards of the language’s inevitable evolution. And yet, shifting conventions — whether perceived as beneficial or detrimental — don’t actually herald a literary apocalypse. Rather, the threat lies in the misapprehended implication that language and its written rules are static entities that can be regulated in tangible ways.

Purists continue to decry the corrosive impact of txt msging, lolspeak, and innumerable other Internetisms. *TIME* recently bemoaned the [loss of quality control](#) with the rise of self-publishing and blogs. Book World’s Dennis Drabelle [defended the art of editing](#) in *The Washington Post*, making the case that discerning editors perform an essential task throughout the

echelons of mainstream culture.

On the other side of the spectrum, however, are those who claim that English isn’t changing fast enough. *The Believer* wrote about [literacy activists](#) picketing the Scripps National Spelling Bee to demand the simplification of English spelling. John Wells, Emeritus Professor of Phonetics at University College London and president of the Spelling Society, [echoed their calls](#) by arguing that the inconsistency of written English has hindered literacy among children and non-native speakers alike. As if to further bolster the case for simplified rules, the city of Birmingham, home to Britain’s second largest urban population, recently decided to [drop apostrophes](#) from all street and road signs to promote consistency with those that already lack them.

Wherever you fall in this debate, there’s no need to start smashing your keyboard. English is, after all, a language principally characterized by its ability to adapt and adopt. Rather than fighting these fluctuations, why not embrace them by honing our understanding of the existing patterns and nuances of the written word? Here are our top five picks for the best guides to spelling, grammar, and proper punctuation (as they’re presently accepted):

[Comma Sense: A Fun-damental Guide to Punctuation](#) by Richard Lederer and John Shore

As far as punctuation goes, most people border on near illiteracy. Richard Lederer’s widely read essay [“Conan the Grammarian”](#) established him as an expert on English language, and in *Comma Sense*, he adopts the same easy approach to the proper use of squiggles, lines, and dots.

[*Grammar Snobs Are Great Big Meanies: A Guide to Language for Fun and Spite*](#)

by **June Casagrande**

Already a popular grammar columnist in LA, June Casagrande takes the tongue-wagging out of the grammar game with her patient and humorous writing. This book provides a no-nonsense overview that will appeal to anyone intimidated by literary elitists.

[*Things That Make Us \[sic\]: The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar Takes on Madison Avenue, Hollywood, the White House, and the World*](#)

by **Martha Brockenbrough**

A snarky antidote to the bestselling *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, this guide incorporates etymology and writing advice, while tackling the blunders of linguistic laziness.

[*Lapsing into a Comma: A Curmudgeon's Guide to the Many Things That Can Go Wrong in Print — and How to Avoid Them*](#)

by **Bill Walsh**

As the chief copyeditor for the business section of *The Washington Post*, Bill Walsh is responsible for both accuracy and eloquence. *Lapsing into a Comma* focuses on the art of editing through attention to style and structure, illustrating the minutiae of punchy writing.

[*Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English \(Second Edition\)*](#)

by **Patricia T. O'Conner**

Written for those who dread grammar and all of its endless rules, this former *New York Times Book Review* editor's concise volume is an engaging survey of the idiosyncrasies of the English language. Originally published in 2003; the follow-up edition features a chapter on email etiquette."

– Originally posted by “Chelsea” at the Flavorwire Blog Archive:

<http://flavorwire.com/10415/avoid-the-apostrophe-apocalypse-a-survey-of-recent-books-on-spelling-grammar-and-punctuation>

■ **March Workshops**

Improving Your Writing Style: Clarity

(Thursday, March 19, 2PM, 112 Perkins Library)

Improving Your Writing Style: Conciseness, Cohesion, and Coherence

(Thursday, March 26, 2 PM, 112 Perkins Library)

■ **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. Encourage your friends and classmates to sign up, as we need a minimum of three to schedule a writing group.

[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.

International Conversation Café:

Meets every Thursday from 1 – 2 PM in the Marketplace (East campus). All are welcome: international and non-international students, faculty, and staff.

■ Grammar Tip of the Month: Use Commas with Nonrestrictive Elements

A **nonrestrictive element** is a phrase that is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence; it could be removed, and the sentence would still make sense. Nonrestrictive elements read like asides or side-comments, so when they are included without commas, they often cause entire sentences to sound like run-ons. For example, in the sentence below, readers may wonder whether the main point of the sentence is that Marina was the president or that she spoke first:

Marina who was the president of the club was first to speak.

However, by setting off the nonrestrictive element (the dependent clause telling us that Marina is the president of the club) with commas, the reader can more easily discern that the main point of the sentence is that Marina spoke first:

Marina, who was the president of the club, was first to speak.

Writers should use commas to set off nonrestrictive elements within sentences. Where would you insert commas (if at all) in the following sentence? The answer will appear in next month's WS Newsletter.

I bought the book that is required for Econ 330 which is a really hard class.

–Source: Andrea A. Lunsford's *Easy Writer* (3rd Edition), available online at <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/easywriter3e/20errors/5.asp>

**“Half my life is an act of revision.”
– John Updike**

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