

Duke University Writing Studio E-News Volume 2, Issue 3, November 2007

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 website at <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>. Both face-to-face and E-Tutor appointments with writing tutors can be reserved in advance online.

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■ **Event of the Month: Find the Three Turkeys**

With Thanksgiving around the corner, are those gourmand cravings starting to kick in? The Writing Studio is getting in the holiday mood early with our “Find the Three Turkeys” contest. Beginning Nov 1, you can hunt for cleverly hidden images of these symbolic fowl on our “Resources for Writers” pages of our website. (From <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>, click the “Resources” link on the left, and happy hunting. Vegetarians/vegans are also welcome.) If you find all three birds, send us an email at wstudio@aas.duke.edu and you will be entered in our Thanksgiving drawing for tasty “Snack Attack Exam Packs.” Winners will be announced in the Dec. E-News.

■ **Upcoming Workshops and Writing Group Schedule**

NOVEMBER WORKSHOPS

Improving Your Writing Style: Conciseness, Cohesion and Coherence (Thurs. Nov. 1, 9 pm, Lilly Library Training Room)

Editing for Clarity and Proofreading for Correctness (Tues. Nov. 6, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library and Thurs. Nov. 8, 9 pm, Lilly Library Training Room)

Improving Your Writing Style: The Four C’s (Tues. Nov. 27, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library and Thurs. Nov. 29, 9 pm, Lilly Library Training Room)

Improving Your Writing Process (Tues. Nov. 27, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library and Thurs. Nov. 29, 9 pm, Lilly Library Training Room)

WRITING GROUPS

CREATIVE WRITING: Contact Facilitator: Rod Frey (rlf5@duke.edu)

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

DISSERTATION GROUP: Contact Facilitator: Richard Musselwhite (rmusselw@duke.edu)

■Grammar Tip of the Month: The Slow Death of the Hyphen?

LONDON (Reuters) - About 16,000 words have succumbed to pressures of the Internet age and lost their hyphens in a new edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Bumble-bee is now bumblebee, ice-cream is ice cream and pot-belly is pot belly. And if you've got a problem, don't be such a crybaby (formerly cry-baby).

The hyphen has been squeezed as informal ways of communicating, honed in text messages and emails, spread on Web sites and seep into newspapers and books. "People are not confident about using hyphens anymore, they're not really sure what they are for," said Angus Stevenson, editor of the *Shorter OED*, the sixth edition of which was published this week.

Another factor in the hyphen's demise is designers' distaste for its ungainly horizontal bulk between words. "Printed writing is very much design-led these days in adverts and Web sites, and people feel that hyphens mess up the look of a nice bit of typography," he said. "The hyphen is seen as messy looking and old-fashioned."

The team that compiled the *Shorter OED*, a two-volume tome despite its name, only committed the grammatical amputations after exhaustive research. "The whole process of changing the spelling of words in the dictionary is all based on our analysis of evidence of language, it's not just what we think looks better," Stevenson said.

Researchers examined a corpus of more than 2 billion words, consisting of full sentences that appeared in newspapers, books, Web sites and blogs from 2000 onwards. For the most part, the dictionary dropped hyphens from compound nouns, which were unified in a single word (e.g. pigeonhole) or split into two (e.g. test tube).

But hyphens have not lost their place altogether. The *Shorter OED* editor commended their first-rate service rendered to English in the form of compound adjectives, much like the one in the middle of this sentence. "There are places where a hyphen is necessary," Stevenson said. "Because you can certainly start to get real ambiguity." Twenty-odd people came to the party, he said. Or was it twenty odd people?

Some of the 16,000 hyphenation changes in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, sixth edition, include the following formerly hyphenated words split in two: **fig leaf**, **hobby horse**, **ice cream**, **pot belly**, **test tube**, and **water bed**. The following formerly hyphenated words have been unified into one word: **bumblebee**, **chickpea**, **crybaby**, **leapfrog**, **logjam**, **lowlife**, **pigeonhole**, **touchline**, and **waterborne**.

Source: Rabinovitch, Simon. "Hyphens Perish as English Marches On: Shorter Oxford English Dictionary Tells the Tale of an Evolving Language." Reuters.com. 21 Sep 2007. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/oddlyEnoughNews/idUSHAR15384620070921?sp=true>>

■ **Quotation of the Month:**

"I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all."

– Richard Wright

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