

Duke University Writing Studio E-News

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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.duke.edu/wstudio/>. Appointments with writing tutors can be reserved in advance online.

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- **Event of the Month: New Student Orientation and Ice Cream Social at Lilly Library**

On Thursday, September 11, from 7-9 p.m., Lilly Library and the East Campus Department of Residence Life are sponsoring an open house event featuring the Duke Writing Studio, OIT, the Academic Resource Center, and other campus groups. All students, faculty, and staff are invited to come learn about campus resources and enjoy some free ice cream! In addition to a make-your-own-sundae station, participants can enter a raffle to win sensational prizes. Writing tutors will be available to explain Writing Studio policies and to help first-time customers schedule appointments online. Come out and join us at Lilly Library on September 11!

■ **Lowly Pencil Still the Write Tool**

According to a recent article in the *Chicago Tribune* that quotes our very own Duke professor Henry Petroski:

When Hymen L. Lipman patented the world's first pencil with an attached eraser 150 years ago, he certainly didn't anticipate its having to compete one day with BlackBerries and online crossword puzzles.

But the eraser pencil has exhibited remarkable staying power amid the rise of the typewriter, the ballpoint pen, the personal computer and all manner of modern hand-held messaging devices over its century-and-a-half existence. In fact, the U.S. is the single largest market for wood-encased pencils today, most of which now come from China. Even the more expensive mechanical pencil has not replaced what is for many writers and note-takers a tried and true basic. It has seen a steady increase in production over the last decade, according to figures from the Writing Instrument Manufacturers Association.

"There's a historic preference for the pencil in the U.S.," said Charles Berolzheimer, 47-

year-old heir to the Berol pencil brand. "Maybe partly because there's a tactile sensation to making a mark on paper with it." His family has manufactured pencils or their raw materials for six generations, and today he is the president of California Cedar Products Co., which exports the state's high quality incense cedar to manufacturers abroad.

Easy to Use

Pencils have also remained popular because of their reliability and ease of use. "It becomes a part of you, an extension of your hand," said Henry Petroski, professor of civil engineering and history at Duke University. His book, "The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance," is widely seen as the definitive work on the subject. "People also twirl the pencil as something to do with their hands while thinking or listening," he said.

Pencils are still widely used in a number of professions, including drafting, architecture and news reporting. Among the most important things in a journalist's tool kit is a pencil, [New York Times](#) correspondent Hassan Fatah told a class of Columbia journalism students last year, as a pen might leak or freeze in cold weather when out reporting.

Petroski agrees. "With a pen, you never know if it's going to write properly or leave a blob of ink at its first contact with paper," he said. "The first mark you make with a pencil, however, will be the same as the last." Pencils also don't run out of batteries or ink, and they can be replaced with mere pocket change.

But Lipman's stroke of genius was not always so universally applauded. At first, "a lot of school teachers opposed them and wanted them outlawed," said Petroski. "They felt that 'erased' pencils encouraged students to be careless because they didn't have to get it right the first time."

Prototypical design

The prototypical design involved a 2- to 3-inch slot cut into the end of the pencil's shaft, filled with a flat piece of prepared India rubber and held in place with glue. The design allowed for the eraser to be sharpened as well, to accommodate mathematicians, architects and other artists who might need to carefully clear away a mark here or there.

Today, eraser pencils are the writing implement of choice for solving crossword puzzles and Sudoku, according to famed *New York Times* crossword editor Will Shortz. Though a pen user himself, he described pencils as "more tactilely satisfying" for many people.

Most of his solvers opt for puzzling with paper and pencil, despite the availability of the crossword online. "It's easier to look at an entire puzzle on one page," he said, which the online version doesn't allow. And of those paper puzzlers, "Most people don't have enough confidence to use pen," he said. The Independent of London reported a

700 percent increase in pencil sales two years ago due to the Sudoku craze.

The pencil's history, of course, stretches back much further than 19th Century America. Ancient Greeks and Romans used a flat piece of lead called a stylus to draw faint lines on papyrus or waxed slates. When a large graphite deposit was discovered in sixteenth-century England, the sooty mineral became widely used as a writing tool, often wrapped in string or sheepskin, and soon after was inserted into sticks of wood hollowed out by hand. "Dry pencils," so called to distinguish them from the fine paintbrushes from which they derived their name, were first mass-produced in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1662.

Lipman's addition to the implement's history certainly has a devoted following. "The pencil will never become obsolete," said Doug Martin, who works as a design engineer in Bowling Green State University's department of chemistry and, ironically, spends his days designing computer interface models. "They're just too handy, too convenient." As a collector with over 10,000 pencils displayed or otherwise scattered around his house, he is drawn to their history and to the fact that they are relatively inexpensive and do not take up a lot of space, he said.

On the production side, Berolzheimer values today's pencil industry for its truly global presence. The raw cedar his company exports is used for making slats in China, which are then shipped to Europe to be made into pencils, often with imported Malaysian rubber, finally making their way back to the U.S. market. Nevertheless, he admitted his initial career plans didn't include carrying on the family business. "I had originally planned on going into computer programming," he said.

Source: *Chicago Tribune* Online, 28 May 2008

<<http://www.chicagotribune.com/features/lifestyle/chi-pencils-fill-0528may28,0,5394878.story>>

■ Upcoming Workshops and Writing Group Schedule

SEPTEMBER WORKSHOPS

- Reading to Write: (Thurs. Sept. 4, 2-3 pm, 112 Perkins Library)
When students comment in class or in their writing about course readings, why are some student's comments so much more interesting than everyone else's? Most likely, they approach reading as a reflective, problem-solving activity. In this workshop, you will learn strategies for interacting more productively and more deeply with what you read.
- Working with Sources: Avoiding Plagiarism (Thurs. Sept. 11, 2 pm, 112 Perkins Library)
When working with sources, how do you decide what needs to be cited? What are the differences among summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation, and under what circumstances is one more appropriate than the other? How do you determine what documentation style to use? This workshop will help ensure that

how you use sources in your academic writing adheres to the Duke University policy on academic honesty.

- Making an Academic Argument (Thurs. Sept. 18, 2-3 pm, 112 Perkins Library)
What constitutes effective academic argument? How can you not only participate in an academic conversation but also contribute something of value to the discussion? This workshop will help you with the critical questions: What is your main claim? What reasons and evidence do you have to support your claim? How do you address possible opposition?
- Organizing a Research Project (Thurs. Sept. 25, 2-3 pm, 112 Perkins Library)
Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed when you are writing a research paper? Whether you are using just a few sources or many, you can manage your research project more effectively if you have a strategy for breaking your task into manageable parts. This workshop will cover finding and evaluating sources, developing and extending research interests into manageable research questions, generating ideas, making claims, and providing evidence.

Reserve a spot online at <http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/ppt.html>.

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 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 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: “That” vs. “Which”

From Dina Friedman's Monthly Writing Advice column,

Many people use “that” and “which” interchangeably, though the words actually have slightly different meanings, which can be confusing. According to the technical rules of English grammar, the word “that” is used for *restrictive clauses*, and the word “which” is used for *non-restrictive clauses*. Consider the following example:

Here is the book that I borrowed from you.

In the example above, the words “that I borrowed from you” help define the *specific* book to which the speaker is referring. In other words, I am asking you to return the specific book that you borrowed from me, not *any* book of your choosing. This clause

is *restrictive* because the phrase “that I borrowed from you” restricts the meaning of the “book” in question. Now consider another example:

Here is the book, which was extremely boring.

The information about boredom in this sentence is extra; it is not necessary to define the book. The speaker is presumably handing you a book, so there is no need to “restrict” which book is being referred to. This is a *non-restrictive* clause; it is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. Now consider yet another possibility. There are several books on the table and you say, “Give me the boring book.” I might reply with the following:

Here is the book that is boring.

In this sentence, the phrase “that is boring” specifies or explains what book I am talking about. It is therefore a *restrictive* clause, essential to the meaning of the sentence. You may notice that non-restrictive (which) clauses often come after a comma. (They are always supposed to include a comma, though many people are not familiar with this rule.) The “that-vs.-which” rules of thumb are, 1) use a comma before which, but usually not before that, and 2) use non-restrictive (which) clauses sparingly, since they are, after all, non-essential parts of any sentence.

Some professional writers never totally understand this difference, so take heart if you still make an occasional error. They can be found in many publications, including *The New York Times*.

Source: Dina Friedman’s Monthly Writing Advice, 1-12, June 2002, Accurate Writing and More website, <<http://www.accuratewriting.com/w1-12.shtml>>

■ **Quotation of the Month:**

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain

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