

# Writing skills a myth?

by Bill Doskoch

The university should look at discontinuing the Writing Competence Test (WCT) altogether, suggests an educational psychology professor who sat on the original committee.

"It has served its purpose and as far as public relations goes, it's been an embarrassment," said Dr. V. Nyberg.

Although he admitted he hasn't been following the issue closely over the past month, Nyberg is a specialist in test construction research and has twenty years experience in that area.

He felt the purpose of the WCT could be fulfilled by the English 30 departmental exam. "If the provincial Department of Education changed it's procedures (to increase the writing component of the score), the information derived there could serve the same purpose. This would save the university the huge expense of having students do it all over again."

The structure of the test was of concern to Nyberg.

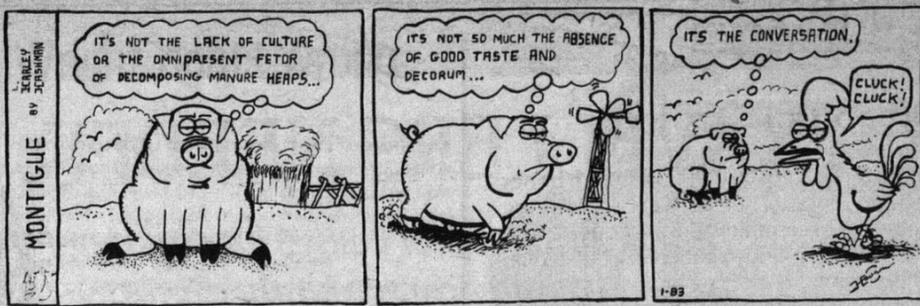
"To write something like that is very much an unreal situation. You're expected to sit down, they hand you a topic and don't allow any references or dictionaries. I suppose in some respects it's not unreasonable but still, how good is it to know how to do it?"

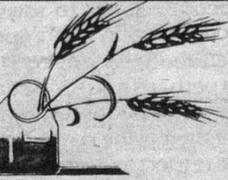
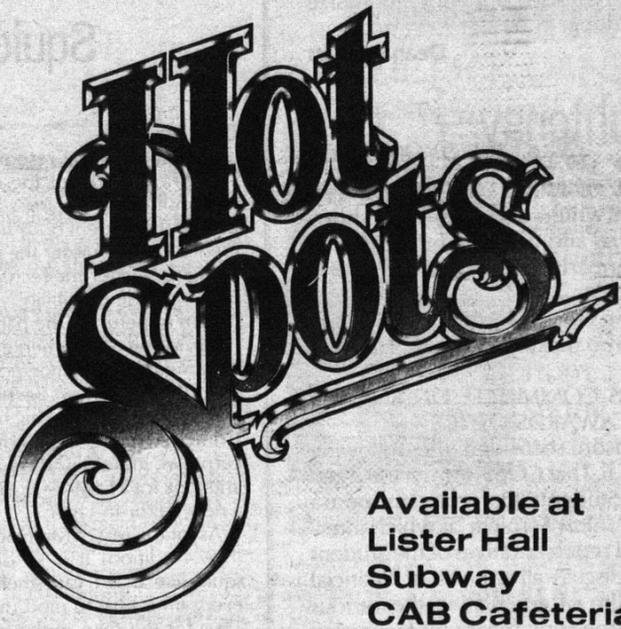
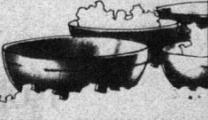
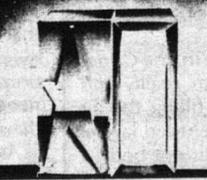
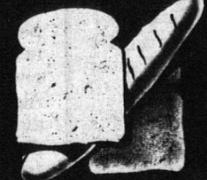
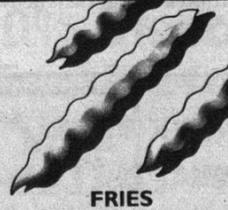
Another question he asked was "the problem of the basic assumption: does everyone coming in have to be able to write well? It would be nice if engineering, math and computer science students could all write well, but is it really essential?"

In any case, "there are very few cases (22) out of the thousands who have written it who have actually failed several times. Just going by that, I don't think the problem is widespread. So, to what extent is the whole exercise cosmetic?"

As for declining standards, "when I was an undergraduate in the nineteen thirties, there was only one person in freshman English out of 200 who could write well, said our professors. The rest of us were illiterate dolts. However, that person had his Ph.D. in English by the time he was 23-years old."

"So, going back to something that used to be is a myth."



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