

Editors' Introduction

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It has been a year since our inaugural issue was published, and *the MENA Writing Studies Journal* began to make itself globally visible through the scholarship we publish and presentations at the 2025 Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the 2026 Research in Editing and Publishing (REAP) and, pending acceptance, the 2027 Publishing and Presenting Research Internationally: Issues for Speakers of English as an Additional Language (PRISEAL). The journal's movement and acceptance into these international organizations demonstrates a growing recognition by scholars that the writing studies research from and about the MENA is relevant, adds to, and raises important questions about the discipline.

In the process, we understood that sustained presence includes engaging with our community and caring about them as deeply as we care about this interdisciplinary thing called writing studies. One does not exist without the other. We meet prospective authors for Q/A sessions about publishing with us and offer authors individual guidance as they revise their manuscripts. We have created a MENA writing studies listserv to ease communication, are developing a map to visualize where we are physically located and what we do. We have approached 2025 Middle East North Africa Writing Center Alliance (MENAWCA) and 2026 Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (ETLHE) organizing committees with an offer to publish conference proceedings, and our guest editors, Anita Moutchoyan and Malakeh Raif Khoury respectively, are now hard at work preparing the two special issues to be published in summer and fall this year. This Volume could not have been completed without the AUB graphic design students, who are responsible for the new branding of the *MENA Writing Studies Journal*, and NYUAD Interactive Media and Visual Arts student, Batool Al Tameemi, whose photography is featured on the cover.

As we engage with these initiatives and projects, we have come to recognize that *MENA Writing Studies Journal* has moved beyond being an outlet for publication to become a facilitator of research and network building in writing studies regionally. We curate and sustain conversations about our local priorities and concerns, act as a conduit for informing our pedagogies, and offer space to articulate theories in ways that speak to our audiences. We also record and celebrate the MENA's past and ongoing initiatives in our series of interviews with project creators and administrators.

In the last year, we were excited to receive emails of support from past faculty who were at the ground levels of their campus writing community and folks outside of the region planning to use our content for their own classes. Your words of encouragement (you know who you are!) were especially important in the last few months, when war reminded us yet again about one constant feature of transnational university work, especially in writing studies, and namely – that everyone is mobile. February of 2026 made that feature clearer or exacerbated it as universities in the Gulf mandated students move off campus, faculty and students in Lebanon traveled to where they felt most safe, thousands were displaced, and education was forced into online spaces at the mercy of intermittent Internet connectivity, and the region mobilized itself for economic and violent impacts. Student and faculty mobility, which under "normal" circumstances is guided by curiosity rather than fear, may be

a catalyst for development in the face of change or may signal violent rupture. Such mobility thus connotes surface-deep engagement, uncertainty, and discontinuity.

Today, as the white phosphorus is settling on the olive trees, our departments will soon be notified of faculty, staff, and students who are choosing not to return, have no homes to return to, and in some cases have found their final resting place, and we will have to embark on a new round of hiring to replace those we've lost. Trying to recognize the enormity of pain and difficulty that complicates our educational and scientific missions, we issued a new call for submissions that allows our community to start making sense of what it means to be an academic in times of war. *When Mars Attacks*, our third special issue, which is now accepting proposals, is uniquely responsive to the realities on the battered Middle Eastern ground. As we welcome each submission, we think about keeping the community together and recognize our responsibility to record the violence so our community's struggles are not forgotten.

The current issue, however, looks back at easier times in which mobility and imagined linguistic standards are occasions for happier reflections. And here again, as we carve out the space for making science and practices on our own terms, we do not wish to other ourselves from the global conversations; on the contrary, as this issue continues to illustrate, we emerge from the liminality of periphery and claim our right to participate in the ongoing conversations.

In "Centering MENA Writing Scholarship within U.S. Transnational Frameworks," co-authored by Saurabh Anand, Erin Zimmerman, Marwa Mehio, Maya Akiki, and Jennifer Nish, Anand reflects on his first years of teaching composition in the U.S. and credits research originating from MENA with pedagogical support that helped him guide students in meeting the demands of the U.S. academic English while also "bringing their own linguistic resources into the classroom." Based on interviews with four teachers, scholars, and writing administrators with experiences in the Middle East, Anand traces how U.S.-based educators can engage in more ethical and contextually adequate writing center, classroom, and scholarly practices. This can be achieved by critically interrogating the application of western standards to non-U.S. contexts (Zimmerman), recognizing transnational and translingual spaces as postcolonial landscapes (Mehio and Akiki), and acknowledging the need for contextually relevant lived experiences in constructing theories that guide institutional practices (Nish).

In "I was interested in learning English but not study it: Two case studies of Saudi Arabian developmental college writers," Soha Youssef examines how two international student writers reflect on their writing abilities in their first term at a university in the United States. Youssef's study utilizes metacognitive interventions employing cover letters, which asks students to identify their own success and struggles with the English language. Youssef finds that, through metacognitive reflection, students increase critical examination of their writing and their desire to learn language, which has the potential to increase rhetorical grammar competency in the multilingual classroom.

Next, we invite you to our first book review. Neiderman's review of Lisa Arnold's *An Imagined America: Language, Literacy, Identity, and Coloniality at Syrian Protestant College, 1866–1920* begins by comparing the rhetoric and memes surrounding Colin Kaepernick's protest against police brutality—widely criticized across media for “protesting the wrong way” in America—with Arnold's representation of the first student protest in the Arab region, which she reveals received a similar backlash from American university administrators and the public. Neiderman demonstrates that this idea of a “right” way to protest forms a recurring thread throughout Arnold's text which shows how “America” was constructed, taught, and contested at the Syrian Protestant College between 1866 and 1920. In particular, how the teaching of writing and composition helped produce an imagined America closely tied to colonial power and systems of knowledge. As Arnold's text invites readers to consider the identity aspirations of multilingual students, Neiderman calls on regional writing instructors to critically examine—and potentially undo or rethink—the colonial project embedded in Composition/English writing education.

Finally, in “Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes: An Interview with Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari,” Mehio invites Arif and Kumari to a conversation about English as a site of tension in forming academic, hierarchized identities. In a rich interview, they detail how their respective experiences with English as speakers from Singapore, India, and Pakistan and as university professors in the New York University in Abu Dhabi fueled the Project's material, conceptual, and pedagogical development. As authors acknowledge material institutional support that enables such initiatives and note high levels of interest and readiness among students and faculty alike to question and revise existing practices surrounding their perceptions of Englishes, they also frame such critical work as labor largely unseen and at risk of forgetting.