

# When Mars Attacks: doing writing in times of war

Special issue for [MENA Writing Studies Journal](#).

War and “business-as-usual” are not terms that many assume coexist. For those of us unfortunately familiar with such turbulent times, life is often measured by what we can still achieve despite the war, and we have learned not to wait for better days. As such, the reality for those of us teaching in the Middle East and other spaces of conflict requires creating a “business-as-usual” pedagogy, institutional practice, and scholarly output while our colleagues and students are displaced, our neighbors shift to online instruction, and we follow our respective live news coverage. While we are maintaining our survival and ensuring the institution functions, this special issue works to confront our lived experiences in times of war and its effects on teaching and writing.

Writing studies scholars note that language and writing have always been entwined with colonial projects, and therefore war and conflict (Arnold, 2025; You, 2018). While language and writing may be instituted to concretize power and ideology, by nature, language and writing also have the power to adapt across situations and contexts, especially in times of conflict and uncertainty. As writing studies teachers and scholars, we often grapple with language ideology and when confronted with war, the consequences of being part of a soft power apparatus become more immediate and tangible. In this moment, when multiple manifestations of conflict are being fueled by language ideologies worldwide, we acknowledge the multiple and layered consequences of violence, and the ripple effects popping up in governments and classrooms otherwise untouched by war.

Every day is filled with moments we remind ourselves to keep going, and war forces us to acknowledge how deeply embodied our daily academic lives are. Robinson (2006) jokes that as academics we live in our heads. That our bodies are just means of transporting our heads to meetings. We know now that wars force us to acknowledge the embeddedness of our daily practices in the phenomenal world outside of our heads, and that it takes intentional reflection to adapt anew each time we hear drones, explosions, sonic booms, ambulance sirens wailing by and to work with our bodies to yet again write, teach, think.

By nature, writing and composition have the power to adapt across situations and contexts. But it is difficult and exhausting. It may also be punishing for authors if adapting results in resistance to the academicwritingmachine (Henderson et al. 2016). And it requires a shift of focus, context, and genre to recognize the ways in which we (faculty and students) are mediated by and mediating writing. We also shape our work through a pedagogy of care as we figure out how to adapt our language, pedagogies, and access for our students and (though we often forget) ourselves (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Students and faculty are living without electricity, in tents, with extended family members, with curfews, different time zones, in battle fields.

This special issue, *When Mars Attacks: doing writing in times of war*, invites submissions from war zones and diasporas regarding your praxis, pedagogies, autoethnographies, and theories as you navigate the disruptions of war or the ripple effects and hot spots that follow. We welcome submissions that explore the broad question of what characterizes the experience of being an academic in times of war.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

## Pedagogy

- War and violence shaping pedagogy and/or writing
- Multiple, overlapping events informing or mediating best practices
- The ways in which connection is built or damaged
- Speaking to our collective trauma in the classroom

- Resistance to personal writing and expressivist process

#### Institution

- Maintaining practices (tenure/hiring/textbooks/exams) when the practice no longer fits the context
- Disrupting and/or problematizing programmatic building and change
- Concerns about continuity across students, staff, and faculty
- Displacement

#### Individual

- Students (and colleagues) recognizing that education is the ticket “out” - and what “out” may mean in different Middle East contexts
- Education never fully becoming a ticket “out” and carrying the war with you whenever you go about your new business as usual
- Brain function shifting from large output to small daily tasks
- Changes in our socializing

#### Ripple Effects and Hot Spots

- Global and local media discourse in narrativizing events, blame, and action
- Our own ethics of representation and language choice
- Other manifestations of conflict and adaptations across outside governments
- Generational effects of multiple wars and overlapping events
- New global conversations and new global relationships

While our journal serves the Middle East North Africa region, we welcome proposals from scholars entrenched in war zones and facing the ripple effects from outside. To that end, we are required to follow the bounds of both American and Lebanese laws. We understand that such content brings anxieties - we are happy to publish under a pseudonym.

Please submit proposals of 300-500 words by June 30th, 2026. We are accepting proposals [through outlook forms](#). Feel free to reach out to [menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb](mailto:menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb) with any submission questions or concerns.

*MENA Writing Studies Journal* accepts manuscripts written in MLA (9th edition) and APA (7th edition).

Our submissions include:

- Think pieces (3,500 words)
- Full-length articles (7,000 words)
- Translingual Literacy Narratives (7,000 words)
- Programmatic Interviews (7,000 words)

Our projected timeline for the special issue:

- Proposals due by June 30th
- Editorial acceptances by July 31st
- First draft submitted by January 15th, 2027
- Reviews completed by March 31st, 2027
- Second drafts submitted by June 30th, 2027
- In press by late 2027/early 2028

References

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- Robinson, K., & Aronica, L. (2009). *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (1st ed.). Penguin Publishing Group.
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