

## UNIT 10 WRITING

### PART 1

August 2006

Dear Staff,

I am writing to shed some light on the August 2006 decision of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) to reclassify the status of Pluto from the ninth planet of our solar system to a dwarf planet. All around the world, many people, long accustomed to believing nine planets comprised our solar system, are questioning why scientists have made the decision at this particular moment in history. Below is an explanation which purports to clarify the new criteria set for defining planets and resulting reasons for the decision to revise the status of Pluto.

Scientists attending the annual twenty-sixth meeting of the IAU in Prague, Czech Republic say that reclassifying Pluto was necessary in light of recent discoveries about bodies in our solar system and beyond. The development of powerful new telescopes has allowed scientists to see more features of celestial bodies that would determine their status. Many new celestial bodies have been discovered with features similar to those of Pluto. According to Professor Arlin Cots of Columbia University in New York, if Pluto had not been stripped of its "planet" status, then many more recently discovered celestial bodies whose orbits and mass resemble features of Pluto, would have had to be included as planets in our solar system.

After much debate, the experts have determined that Pluto does not meet all the requirements for the definition of a "planet", which is "a celestial body that is in orbit around the sun, has a rounded shape, and has a cleared neighborhood around its orbit." Pluto's orbit overlaps that of Neptune. As an icy body, it does not have sufficient mass to be considered a planet.

The questioning of Pluto's status is not new. For a number of years, many scientists have raised questions about it. Since the year 2000, the world-renowned Hayden Planetarium in New York City has not considered Pluto a planet.

According to the changed definition, there are now eight planets in our solar system --all named for the gods and goddesses of antiquity: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune --that meet all the criteria to be considered as "planets".

Pluto, a planet discovered in 1930 and named for the mythological Roman god of the underworld, will henceforth be classified as a "dwarf planet".

I hope the above explanation has offered some clarification of the IAU's decision. Any staff interested in exploring further should consult the Internet by searching with keywords, "Pluto" and "IAU".

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Yours sincerely,

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\*"Arcadia" is a fictitious name.