

10 Myths of College Writing

Myth: Only writers with problems need feedback.

Reality: Good writers seek feedback. Think about all the readers a professional writer consults with before publishing: colleagues, reviewers, editors, and copyeditors.

Myth: Good writers write quickly and effortlessly.

Reality: Good writers prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and sweat over their writing. When Ernest Hemingway was asked why he rewrote the last page of *A Farewell to Arms* 29 times, he explained that he was just “getting the words right.” That’s what writers do.

Myth: Good writers know exactly what they want to say before they start writing.

Reality: Good writers learn by writing and are always open to having their minds changed.

Myth: Readers want black and white explanations.

Reality: Readers trust writers who delve into the complexity of an issue.

Myth: Simple language seems dumb.

Reality: Ornate language and wordy sentences muddy your argument and make readers suspect you’re hiding your lack of ideas behind fancy words. Use concise, simple, fresh language.

Myth: A thesis should be one-sentence long.

Reality: Theses often consist of several steps or concepts that take multiple sentences to explain.

Myth: Using I is always bad.

Reality: No universal rule exists on using I. Different audiences and different disciplines have different expectations. If your audience thinks using I is appropriate, you can use it.

Myth: He can function as a neutral pronoun that refers to both men and women.

Reality: In academic writing, he is no longer considered an appropriate pronoun to denote both genders.

Myth: The five-paragraph essay format works for every assignment.

Reality: Function dictates form. What you want the paper to accomplish will determine the number of paragraphs, the length and placement of your thesis, and so on.

Myth: Changing your writing style for your audience is selling out.

Reality: Gear your writing toward your audience to get your point across. You would explain the Ram’s defensive scheme differently to a group of tourists from China than you would to a group of high school football coaches—not because you’re compromising your intellect, but because you want to communicate effectively.