



Common Writing Myths

Only bad writers need feedback.

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

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* thirty-nine times, he explained that he was just “getting the words right.” That’s what writers do.

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

Reality: Good writers develop their ideas as they write, and are open to changing their minds.

Longer is better.

Reality: Stop when you’re done. Readers appreciate not having their time wasted.

Using I is always bad.

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

Writing is a linear process.

Reality: Writing can be done in several places and directions concurrently and is as easily manipulated in space as it is in time. Texts can be constructed from writing done on separate pieces of paper; words, sentences, paragraphs, whole sections can be shuffled into different sequences. Writing is recursive.

Writing is speech plus spelling and punctuation.

Reality: Every kind of writing has its own conventions of form and expression quite different from speech. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, indentation, word-dividing, layout, and so forth, are necessary aspects of transcription necessary to make written language readable for readers. For all writers, undue concern with transcription can interfere with the exploratory aspects of writing.

Writing should be right the first time.

Reality: Writing generally requires many drafts and revisions to get ideas into a form that satisfies the writer. A separate editorial polishing is required to make any text appropriate for another reader.

Writing can be done to order.

Reality: Writing is most often reluctant to come when it is most urgently required, yet quite likely to begin to flow at inconvenient or impossible times.

Writing is a solitary activity.

Reality: Writing often requires other people to stimulate discussion, to listen to choice phrases, to provide feedback of various kinds.

Writing is a tidy activity.

Reality: Writing is messy, it spreads itself all over the writing surface, in many different files.

Further assistance

For further assistance, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library on the first floor in the LRC.