

Myth #1

“I can’t use ‘I’ in an academic paper.” There may be occasions to use personal language in academic writing: Refer to your assignment prompt or ask your instructor if using the first-person “I” is appropriate in a particular assignment or within a particular discipline. Using the third person may make your ideas sound like they’re being piped in from another solar system. Take ownership of your opinions and ideas.

Myth #2

“This sentence needs a comma.” It’s not all about the punctuation. If a sentence is too long or the ideas are hard to follow, adding a comma probably won’t make the sentence or the ideas more clear. Focus on the ideas, not the punctuation.

Myth #3

“I just need help with my grammar.” Just as it’s not all about punctuation, it’s not all about grammar. The best grammar in the world isn’t going to turn a weak idea into a strong one. Focus on the ideas first, then the grammar.

Myth #4

“The professor will understand what I’m saying!” Try not to use your instructor as an excuse to avoid having to explain yourself. If you’re trying to write *reader-based prose*—if you’re writing with the *reader’s needs* in mind—then you should be aiming for a broad audience that includes your professor as well as other readers. Your instructor may also have a specific audience in mind, so don’t be afraid to ask.

Myth #5

“I’m explaining too much.” You’re not. It’s better to over-explain than to under-explain. Writers tend to fill in the blanks and to feel like their message is painfully obvious because they have made connections in their own minds. If you are indeed “explaining too much,” your instructor or your tutor will let you know.

Myth #6

“My writing is perfect.” It’s not. Never underestimate the power of feedback.

Myth #7

“I’ll just write an outline.” An outline can be difficult to live up to and can make the writing process more difficult. An outline may also keep you from thinking as you write—that is, you may feel a need to stick to the ideas in the outline, rather than allowing your mind to come up with new and perhaps stronger ideas. Instead of sticking to a strict outline of paragraphs, try writing “chunks” of text. You can figure out how the chunks are connected as you write and revise the paper.

Myth #8

“I have to have an introduction before I can start my paper.” You don’t. Stressing about not having an introduction can create writer’s block. Strictly keeping to an introduction may also keep you from thinking about your ideas in new ways as you write. There’s no writing law that says you can’t write the intro later. Rather than describing everything you’re planning to write about, try to begin by writing “chunks” of text.

Myth #9

“I’m in the research stage right now. I’m not ready to write.” Rather than following a strictly linear pattern, writing is *recursive*—that is, a writer naturally goes back and forth between the various stages of writing (such as researching, drafting, and revising). Also, try not to think in terms of having everything figured out before you begin to write; instead, allow yourself to think as you write. In other words, you’re always ready to write.

Myth #10

“Let me consult my trusty thesaurus here.” Why use a “ten-dollar word” when a “two-dollar word” will often do just as well or better? A *grandiose* word isn’t necessarily going to make you sound *dexterous*—if you’re misusing a word or using an *obscure* word, you may end up losing your reader and/or making your writing sound silly. Keep it simple.

Myth #11

“Revision is just moving a few words around.” Revision is making big changes such as completely restructuring your idea or paper—it’s not just cutting and pasting a word or two, adding a comma, or fixing typos (that’s editing/proofreading). The point of *revision* is to determine what is and isn’t working in a draft. Try not to fall in love with your first draft and all the ideas in it. It’s time to let go.

Myth #12

“This paper is a mess.” Sometimes a mess can be a good thing; a paper that feels like a mess may be a sign that the writer is thinking and learning. Remember that a first draft is just a start—it’s your first attempt to think through and write about something. Make room for creativity, and never underestimate the power of revision.

Myth #13

“I’m not a good writer.” Being a good writer is about being a good communicator—you don’t have to be a poet to explain your ideas clearly. Good writing comes with practice, hard work, and revision.

Myth #14

“The writing center is only for inexperienced writers, first-year students, or English classes.” This may be the biggest myth of all. Any writer can benefit from working with a tutor—we even get an occasional professor as a tutee. A writing tutor can provide something that writers—even experienced writers—cannot provide for themselves: an outside perspective. In other words, the writing center is for all writers!