

*Myth: 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.

*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* thirty-nine 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 develop their ideas as they write, and are open to changing their minds.

*Myth: Readers want simple explanations.*

Reality: Readers trust writers who recognize and communicate the complexity of controversial issues.

*Myth: Straightforward language seems dumb.*

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

*Myth: Longer is better.*

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

*Myth: 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.

*Myth: The 5-paragraph essay format works for every assignment.*

Reality: A five-page essay will not fit into five paragraphs. Write a clear thesis, devote each paragraph to a topic, and don’t worry about how many paragraphs it takes.

*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 Green Bay Packers’ 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.

*Myth: Geniuses don’t need to follow rules.*

Reality: The goal of writing is to communicate. The rules of format, grammar and punctuation are a set of shared expectations between writer and reader that help your reader understand you.