

TOP 10

Myths about Learning to Write

Students hate to write.

It's sad but true that some students come to hate writing through bad experiences. Yet no one is born hating to write. Students' attitudes about writing begin to improve when they write their own stories.

Students have nothing interesting to say.

All students have lively and unique ideas about the world around them. And they always seem to find things to tell their friends. If we just give students chances to write down their ideas, we'll be amazed with what they come up with.

If you can't spell, you can't write.

Good writers first write all their thoughts and ideas. Then they revise, revise, revise until they're satisfied they've said what they want to say. Then—and only then—is it time to edit for spelling and other rules such as capitalization, punctuation, and word usage.

Only great writers can be creative.

Different types of writing have different challenges, but there's no law that says students have to learn one type first. What's important is that they choose the best type of writing for what they want to say—whether a poem, a letter, or an essay.

You can spot a good writer at a glance.

Good writers don't all look the same, they don't all learn the same, and they don't all use the same methods. Some writers jot a lot of notes before starting to write; others jump right in; some writers outline; some doodle in the margins while they think; some write best to music; some write best sitting under a tree. The point is that all writers are individuals and need to discover what works best for them.

Real writers get it right the first time.

Most of us can't even write a grocery list without making some changes. Even famous authors, poets, and journalists have to produce a few rough drafts before arriving at their best work. The important thing is to keep writing until you've said what you mean.

You have to know what you are going to say before you begin writing.

The funny thing about writing is that it actually helps you think. Many writers don't discover exactly what they're trying to say until after they've written for pages. Writing not only helps students think deeply, but it helps them find out what they already know.

Writing is built one sentence at a time.

Writing is made up of words and sentences but it's actually written first as chunks of ideas. Students don't need to master the sentence before they go on to the paragraph. They just need to start writing any way they can—revising is for later.

Good writers work alone.

There's probably a good writer somewhere who likes to write in a quiet closet. But most writers are people who write with frequent input from others. Student writers learn even more when they are part of a "community" of others—sharing ideas, asking questions, and revising their writing.

Writers improve most when teachers point out their mistakes.

A student paper dripping with blood-red marks on every line does not a better writer make. Students do learn best when they get feedback, but writers improve by first learning what parts they wrote well and then focusing on what parts still need work.

Adapted from "10 Myths about Learning to Write" (www.ncte.org)