



10 Myths about Learning to Write

from the National Council of Teachers of English

Do you have fond memories of learning to write? Most people would say "No!" They'd probably add, "Writing was hard—I never got it right!"

Learning to write IS difficult. But sometimes people get discouraged for the wrong reasons. They fall into the trap of believing things about writing that just aren't true.

Members of the National Council of Teachers of English want to set the record straight with this list of myths about learning to write.

1. Kids hate to write.

It's sad but true that some kids come to hate writing through bad experiences. Yet no one is born hating to write. For instance, kids love to tell stories—their own stories—from events at school, other kids, TV, daydreams, and more. When kids begin by writing their own stories, they learn to love to write.

2. 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.

3. Kids have nothing interesting to say.

Are you kidding? Anyone who's spent any time around kids knows they're full of lively and unique ideas about the world around them. And they always seem to find things to tell their friends. If we just give kids chances to write down their ideas, we'll be amazed with what they come up with.

4. 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 kids think deeply, but it helps them find out what they already know—not just in English class but in everything from math to biology to music.

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

Oh, yes you can! 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.

6. 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. Kids 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.

7. Only great writers can be creative.

Baloney! Different types of writing—including creative writing like poems and plays—have different challenges, but there's no law that says kids have to learn one type first. What's important is that kids choose the best type of writing for what they want to say—whether a poem, a letter, or a report.

8. Good writers work alone.

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

9. *You can spot a good writer at a glance.*

There is no gene for writing! 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.

10. *Poor marks make good writers.*

A student paper dripping with blood-red marks on every line does not a better writer make. Kids do learn best when they get feedback, but harsh grading isn't the answer. Writers improve by first learning what parts they wrote well and then focusing on what parts still need work.