

THE
Workplace
WRITER'S
PROCESS



A GUIDE TO GETTING THE JOB DONE

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The following is an excerpt from the book [The Workplace Writer's Process: A Guide to Getting the Job Done](#).

Chapter 1

Five Myths That Can Hurt You

Common misconceptions about writers and writing can hurt your chances of success. Let's identify and debunk them here and now.

- The Destiny Myth: Writers are special people
- The Universal Writer Myth: Everyone can write
- The One-Size-Fits-All Myth: Writing is writing
- The Big Idea Myth: The *idea* is the hard part
- The One-Step Writing Myth: Writing is just drafting

The Destiny Myth

Myth: Writing is destiny that people are born to.

Reality: Writing is a skill developed through effort and intention.

Some people imagine that writers are special creatures, sprung from the womb with a thoughtful look and a pen in hand. That's the Destiny Myth, and it quickly becomes a limiting belief.

- If you don't think of yourself as a natural-born writer, you'll avoid jobs or assignments that entail writing. Ultimately, buying into this myth may constrain your career options.
- What if you pride yourself on your prose? If you believe that only "writers" should take on writing tasks, you risk becoming the writer for your group or workplace, pigeonholed into the role. This may limit your career options as well.

It's no myth that writing comes more easily to some people than others. But as the psychologist, professor, and MacArthur genius grant recipient Angela Duckworth points out in her book *Grit*, natural talent is only the starting point for achievement. Effort counts much more. We prefer to attribute success and achievement to talent instead of effort, and that's a problem. Duckworth writes:

"The 'naturalness bias' is a hidden prejudice against those who've achieved what they have because they worked for it, and a hidden preference for those whom we think arrived at their place because they're naturally talented."

Our persistent belief in talent as the source of success damages both those with natural talent and those who labor diligently for their achievements.

How to counteract the Destiny Myth: If you identify as a writer, let other people know the variety of the tasks involved. Expose the processes. Expose the activities of planning and revising as well as drafting. Encourage others to contribute and write.

The Universal Writer Myth

Myth: Everyone in the workplace should be able to write for the business.

Reality: Not everyone writes *effective* content.

This misconception is almost the opposite of the Destiny Myth, yet it can do as much damage.

The people who promote this belief are often adept with words, exhibiting strong verbal intelligence. They assume that writing is as easy for others as themselves. (People often undervalue their own strengths, not understanding that they are difficult for others.)

The Universal Writer Myth marginalizes the effort involved in effective writing.

Writing *can* be easy if you don't care about who reads your content, or what they think or do after reading it.

In the business context, effective writing is trickier.

▮ To be a valued writer, you must write valuable content.

Anyone can write 600 words on a topic vaguely related to the job and put it in a blog post. But what does it accomplish?

We've all seen blogs that result from the Universal Writer Myth, populated with content of little value for the prospective audience.

When you write without consideration for the reader, that's called journaling. It's a fine activity for personal development and deep thought, but holds little value beyond yourself.

Writing effectively for business requires that you execute several tasks, including:

- Finding the right tone and style

- Creating content that serves the target audience or advances business objectives
- Fitting the writing work and deadline into existing obligations
- Navigating internal approval and publication processes

How to counteract the Universal Writer Myth: If your workplace adheres to the Universal Writer Myth, the processes described in this book provide critical structure that helps everyone become more effective.

The One-Size-Fits-All Myth

Myth: If you're a good writer, you can write anything with equal ease and success. Writing is writing, right?

Reality: Writing has many specialized skill sets; success in one format does not translate automatically to success in others.

Congratulations, you wrote a terrific LinkedIn ad campaign. Since you did so well, why don't you write the product documentation next? This happened to one writer I know at a company she joined. She ran into the One-Size-Fits-All-Myth.

The myth springs from the underlying idea that all writing is alike. Once people find a skilled writer, they ask that person to handle nearly all written communications.

Would you ask the person framing out an industrial warehouse to do detailed finish work on a hand-crafted chair? They might be able to do beautiful woodworking, but you cannot tell by the way that they frame the warehouse. These are different skill sets; success in one does not indicate skill in another.

Writing effective product documentation is a specialized skill. Those who do it well are adept at looking past their existing knowledge and thinking in a

linear, logical fashion. Advertising copywriting is different art form, packing the magic of persuasion into as few words as possible.

Although you may welcome the chance to learn something new, the danger of the One-Size-Fits-All Myth is that others may not realize the learning curve you must tackle. If the people around you believe in this myth, you may be put in a situation in which, working outside your existing competencies, you cannot deliver effective content.

How to counteract the One-Size-Fits-All Myth: Once you start having success as a writer at work, you *will* be asked to take on projects that are outside of your comfort zone. You'll have to decide what to do about those requests.

These projects may be wonderful opportunities for growth. If you accept them, let others know that you are building new skills. If asked to write a script for a video when you have not done so before, try responding, "Let me research scriptwriting first, then scope out how much work it will involve." If you're not comfortable or able to invest the time, return with "This is outside my area of expertise. With more time, I could take a class, but we might get better results by hiring a professional scriptwriter."

The Big Idea Myth

Myth: Once you have the big idea, the rest is easy.

Reality: The idea is a starting point; effective execution is most of the work.

Good ideas are everywhere. If ideas were the main factor in writing quality, you could order nearly any book in your favorite genre from Amazon and enjoy it. Hollywood would be filled with terrific movies.

Writers exhibit the Big Idea Myth when they worry about others "stealing their ideas" for the next great blockbuster novel.

Ideas are abundant. Effective execution is difficult.

The Big Idea Myth is pervasive in the workplace, particularly in businesses with a strong focus on protecting intellectual property.

For writers, the Big Idea Myth can reduce recognition of their effort. Experts deliver dozens of pages of technical content to a writer, who turns it into something wonderful. The expert's name goes on the finished piece, and the writer disappears.

How to counteract the Big Idea Myth. Make the processes described in this book visible to others. Start by collaborating with others during the planning phase, so those around you understand that content must align with a larger plan. Make sure others understand the effort involved in drafting and revising. Demonstrate that execution is critical to success.

The One-Step Writing Myth

Myth: Write the words down and you're done.

Reality: Drafting is the middle of a much longer process.

When you treat the drafting process as the real work of writing, you exhibit the One-Step Writing Myth. This book is designed to dispel that particular myth; writing the first draft is only one small section of the much larger effort.

Writing begins with the planning phase, and it's not done until revision and, ideally, approval and publication. Without planning and research, the writing is difficult. If you stop before the work is out in the world, you cannot be a successful or effective writer.

The One-Step Writing Myth gets you into trouble when used in estimating workload.

For example, imagine that a blog editor asks if you have time to write a 2,000-word post on a topic that you're familiar with. You think, *I can write about 800 words an hour, so I can get this done in three hours with time to spare.* Smiling, you say yes.

Watch out, you've just bought into the One-Step Writing Myth. You forgot about the time to plan the project, to outline, to let the idea simmer in the background, and to revise and polish. You certainly neglected to factor in time for making revisions based on feedback.

Remember that quantity and quality are different measures, each requiring an investment of time. Consider the art of the advertising copywriter, paid large dollar amounts for small numbers of words. The talent is picking the right words.

How to counteract the One-Step Writing Myth: Use the “Scoping the Work” worksheet in the Resources section of this book to include all phases of the process in your planning.

There's one more rampant misconception about writing at work: The Lone Writer Myth. That one gets its own chapter.

If you enjoyed this excerpt, check out the entire book on Amazon at <http://amzn.to/2tvt9tl>.

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