

Writing is Right the First Time

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Wouldn't it be amazing if your high school essay had everything correct the first time? I'm sure you are thinking, "Absolutely, but is that impossible!" Well, you are correct. Most high school students can agree that their teachers expect their drafts to be perfect. These students are given an outline to follow, they have the information, so why is it not right the first time? Keep this thought and we will get back to it later. For now, let's start with the history behind this myth first. The myth that writing should be right the first time has been around for many years. This idea was formed because oftentimes high school students were taught that their writing should be correct when writing their first draft. This perfect first draft will not have grammatical errors, everything will be fluent, and no changes will be needed. Teachers imply this myth so their students spend less time on needing to make revisions. It allows teachers to cram more content into one single school year, giving the students all the education they need for that grade level. With all these rules to follow for a perfect first draft, it takes the writer away from their writing; they lose their focus. Therefore, this rule should be abolished because it creates unrealistic expectations for the writer.

If a writer was to follow this myth, their writing would be perfect in their eyes. They

would not see that comma out of place or the misuse of words like “there,” “their,” and “they're.” The paper would simply sparkle in their eyes, and they would feel so confident. Students have this idea that the first draft is close to perfect. This is where the rule, writing is right, comes to play. Kendall Haven explains this idea perfectly by stating “This myth survives because every student envisions the great writers scribbling perfect, flowing prose every time they set pen to paper” (4). This gives great context as to why the myth is still followed. Like I have previously stated, students have this vision that as soon as the pen hits the paper, it is nothing but perfect grammar and sentence structures. But students got this vision from teachers, and when they break the rule they have a slight fear of failure. So rather than this myth being followed, it is more of an expectation that writers set for themselves. They have this expectation that their writing must be free of all errors and drafting is not really necessary. This expectation is presented by both the writer and teachers. I think it is safe to say that all high school teachers and sometimes college professors expect a flawless paper from their students. But the negative part about this expectation is that it leads writers to feel that fear of failure. I mean, it is understandable: the writer doesn't meet the expectations; therefore, they are looked down upon, and their teachers fail them. They all have every right to think this, but this rule should not have this type of impact on writers.

This rule is extremely hard to follow because writers will have errors whether they like it or not. But this error is what students are so afraid of; they want the perfect paper so they can get that perfect grade. Haven also states, “The dangerous inference of this myth is that, if students write an ineffective first draft, they are justified in assuming they

are lousy writers” (3). The myth puts these thoughts in students’ minds and that brings down their intelligence. If they see themselves as “lousy writers,” they will not be motivated to write anymore. It’s true, though. Why would you want to write if you are just seen as a lousy writer? However, with this rule, you have to feel lousy after your first draft so you can make your next draft better. This leads to using your peers to read over your paper and mark the things that you may be missing. Frank Smith furthers this thought and states, “writing generally requires many drafts and revisions to get ideas into a form that satisfies the writer, and that a separate editorial polishing is required to make the text appropriate for a different reader” (85). Writing is meant to have drafts and revisions. These help the writer to further expand their thoughts and help them improve their writing. It is agreed that revisions and drafts are useful; therefore, it is hard to follow this rule because if a revision is needed there is obviously an error in the paper. With this error, the paper is no longer perfect, breaking the rule of having it right the first time.

At this point, it is very clear that when this rule is followed it will have a negative impact on writing. Lennie Irvin explains this situation through his writing and states, “we put unrealistic expectations on early drafts, either by focusing too much on the impossible task of making them perfect (which can put a cap on the development of our ideas), or by making too little effort because we don’t care or know about their inevitable problems” (4-5). This perfectly explains the impact this rule has on writers because it expresses that writers can get stuck with their train of thought after following this rule. When this happens writers are having to spend extra time on their paper to try and think more about their writing to get their thoughts back. All of this connects to why the

expectations of perfect writing are unrealistic. Writers are having to take away from their thinking time to critique their writing thus far. These are just extra requirements that cancel out peer review even though it is still needed. Again, this does not make sense and is unrealistic.

Aside from drafts and revisions, this rule is often ignored while writing. It is common for a writer to restart their writing or erase certain parts that are not necessary. From personal experience, I can say that it is very easy to ignore this rule. I am a perfectionist, and I wish my writing could be right the first time. It would also save so much time. But I also make several mistakes throughout my writing and having a peer read over my writing helps me see my errors and ways I can improve my writing. When I do try to follow this rule I drift away from the requirements and the main focus on my writing. The mistakes I make, other writers may make too. The article "10 Myths about Learning to Write" from the National Council of Teachers of English agrees by saying, "even famous authors, poets, and journalists have to produce a few rough drafts before arriving at their best work." Even well-educated writers make mistakes and have to write several drafts before they are confident with releasing their writing. They take numerous days and hours writing their draft and then take it to their reviewers with an open mind. This allows them to be open to the reviewer's opinion and apply it to their next draft.

This rule is broken every time I write. That is because I do not wish to waste my time following a rule that will damage my grade and final draft in the end. Personally, when I have followed this rule I have found that my grade was worse than what it would have been. This is because I focused so much on a perfect paper and refused to allow

peer review since I believed it was already right. After coming to a realization that it was a rule that should be broken, my writing improved, and I appreciated my peer view a whole lot more. What made me realize that this rule was pointless was seeing that it was nearly impossible to make no grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. This led me to believe that the requirements for this rule were unrealistic and should not be followed by any writer. Now going back to the question from the beginning, the reason writing isn't right the first time is because drafts are meant to have errors so they can be revised. Students, adults, educated writers, even teachers, make several mistakes when it comes to writing. It is part of our everyday lives.

With that being said, the rule that writing should be right the first time is again unrealistic and does not need to be followed. Writers should just focus on their thoughts and get everything down before they lose it. They can use this as their first draft and then make changes as they see something that will improve their writing. Once writers forget about this rule, they will continue to practice their writing skills and rely on their peers for their honest opinions. Their writing skills will enhance, their fear will diminish, and their confidence will be great when they ask for revisions. The more you, as a writer, make mistakes and allow room for error, the more your writing will become more effective and interest the reader.

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