



# Debunking Essay Myths

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Essay-writing “myths” are fallacious ideas about essay writing that have become commonplace despite their ineffectiveness. Improve your essay-writing skills by knowing the difference between essay-writing myth and reality.

<p><b>Myth</b> The first sentence of an analytical paragraph is called the “topic sentence.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Claims</b> The first sentence of an analytical paragraph does not just speak to a vague “topic,” but it must make a specific argumentative “claim” about the text that is a sub-argument of the central thesis.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> The first sentence of an analytical paragraph is called the “claim.”</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> The thesis statement can appear anywhere in an introductory or concluding paragraph.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Thesis Statements</b> The function of the introductory and concluding paragraphs is to showcase the thesis by moving in the introduction from a broad, introductory remark to the narrow, focused thesis statement, and moving in the conclusion from the narrow, focused thesis statement to a broad, closing statement.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> The thesis appears as the introduction’s last sentence and the conclusion’s first sentence.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> Some plot summary and biographical information is necessary in an essay.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Plot Summary</b> The target audience for an essay is a person who is already familiar with the works under consideration, their authors, and their literary contexts. They have already read and thought about the works under consideration, so rehearsal of this information is totally unnecessary in an essay.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> No plot summary or biographical information is necessary in an essay.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> It’s appropriate to move back and forth between evidence and analysis in an analytical paragraph.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Analytical Paragraphs</b> Keeping claim, evidence, and analysis separate results in a more organized sentence that, in turn, is more coherent and persuasive. Good essayists use effective repetition to help link their separate sections of evidence and analysis to help demonstrate the validity of the analytical paragraph’s claim.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> The evidence and analysis sections of an analytical paragraph must be kept separate.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> It’s appropriate to use “signposting” to highlight and call attention to an essay’s thesis.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>“Signposting”</b> “Signposting” (e.g., “This essay will prove that...”, “This quotation illustrates that...”) wastes words and reduces the concision of sentences. The thesis statement is always the culminating sentence of the introductory paragraph: no further “signposting” is required.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> It’s not appropriate to use “signposting” anywhere in an essay, for any reason.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> A conclusion must include an “acknowledgement of limitation” and a “new possibility.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Concluding Paragraphs</b> An “acknowledgement of limitation” and a “new possibility” run the risk of providing information tangential to the essay itself, and often take up words better devoted to the analytical section of the essay. Readers want to know about your thesis statement, not its limitations or alternative possibilities.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> A conclusion may omit these components in favour of a review of its sub-arguments.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> Grammar and style are irrelevant, as long as the reader knows what I’m trying to say.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✗</p>	<p><b>Grammar and Style</b> Grammatical errors and stylistic deficiencies drain an essay of its credibility and authority, reducing its overall persuasiveness and impact. Bad grammar and infelicitous style send the message that you don’t care about the subject matter or respect your reader.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> Correct grammar and style lend credibility and authority to an essay.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✓</p>

<p><b>Myth</b> Essay titles are irrelevant and optional.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✘</p>	<p><b>Titles</b> A descriptive title provides important information about your essay, including the author(s) and title(s) of the work(s) under consideration, as well as a general idea of its overall subject matter. It “sets the stage” for and offers a concise preview of your introductory paragraph.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> Essay titles are important and obligatory.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✔</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> The only evidence that counts comes from long, direct quotations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✘</p>	<p><b>Evidence</b> The only evidence you should provide in the “evidence” section of an analytical paragraph is that which you go on to analyze in the “analysis” section. Long direct quotations can often be paraphrased into shorter indirect quotations, which are more concise and which still count as evidence.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> Valid evidence can come in the form of direct or indirect quotations, and long or short quotations.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✔</p>
<p><b>Myth</b> There’s nothing wrong with using AI tools such as ChatGPT to write an essay.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✘</p>	<p><b>AI Tools</b> An essay should express your own ideas about and analyses of the text(s) under consideration, not those repackaged by large-language model (LLM) artificial intelligence (AI) platforms. Using AI tools is cheating, whether you use them in initial brainstorming phases or later composition phases.</p>	<p><b>Reality</b> It is inappropriate to use AI tools such as ChatGPT at any stage of the writing process.</p> <p style="text-align: left;">✔</p>