Myth 7 You Can't Get a Job if You Didn't Write Well in College

Or, College Writing Ensures Professional Success

The following passages are all recent. Their advice is clear: You won't get a good job if you don't write well in college.[1]

- In a technologically driven world, many students no longer see writing as a relevant skill to their career path. This mistaken view, unfortunately, leaves students who fail to take writing seriously in college at a disadvantage after graduation. *Pennsylvania State University website*
- As expert graduate recruiters, we have witnessed first-hand, time and time again employers choosing to hire one graduate over another because of their writing skills. *Give a grad a go website and blog*
- [Written] responses riddled with typos or confusing and improper grammar may cause co-workers or superiors to question your professionalism or attention to detail. *Tulane University website*
- Having excellent writing skills can make you an indispensable member of your team or company. And it's one of the best ways to remain consistently employable – no matter your profession. *Forbes Magazine*
- Writing well is one of those skills that can help you rise above in your career, no matter what you do. When done well, strong writing almost falls into the background as your information is seamlessly delivered to your audience. On the flip side, poor writing is immediately recognized and can damage your standing. *Oregon State University website*

From university and professional sources alike, the passages imply that *correct writing* will ensure professional opportunity. They say students who ignore their writing will be less employable, and those who make *correct writing* errors will be judged and will "damage their standing."

Like myth 6, this myth makes assumptions about writing transitions. It assumes one of two things. College and workplace writing are similar enough that college writers will transition to workplace writing easily. Or, college and workplace writing are different, but *correct writers* will easily adapt to workplace writing. In either case, this myth makes *correct writing* even more manifestly desirable – necessary for school, and also for what comes afterward.

As with other kinds of writing we've explored, workplace writing is not all the same. It varies according to fields, places, roles, and relationships. But relative to college writing, workplace writing has broad similarities, if we define it as written communication used in professional industries including medical, governmental, and corporate workplaces, such as emails, memos, and reports. We can likewise see broad similarities in college writing, defined as written communication used in college courses, in genres including term papers and essays, response papers, written examinations, lab reports, and case studies. We'll explore both in this myth, by way of addressing the myth that one guarantees the other.

Our origin story starts when college writing and employability first became linked in public conversation.

7.1 Context for the Myth

7.1.1 College Writing and Employment Were Purposefully Linked

Claims linking college and employment, such as those in the opening passages, were not always common. They grew within a more general literacy myth taking root in the nineteenth century.

Discussed in depth by historian Harvey Graff, the general literacy myth suggested that school-based reading and writing and would guarantee economic development and upward mobility. It was reinforced through British and US culture and institutions. This myth sends similar messages, specifically about college literacy.

For the myth to start, college writing and professional success had to be linked, and universities had good reason to promote this connection. As they expanded enrollment and shifted from classical languages to English, early dissenting academy leaders framed English study "as a means of economic advancement and political reform." This means the earliest English composition courses connected *correct writing* and employability.

Popular periodicals included pointed messages about college literacy during the same years. Readers of London's *Lady's Magazine* in 1779, for instance, would encounter the fictional Tom, "ashamed of his father's illiteracy and vulgarity" and headed to university to build a different life.[2]

Still, universities did not have a large audience in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even those with access to education usually stopped after secondary school.[3] There was a growing UK and US middle class with written literacy, but many were skeptical of college study, which came at the expense of work experience and wages.

Many thought college came at the expense of practical sense, too. University students, wrote London journal editor William Chambers in 1876, were "so devoid of pliability and common-sense, as to be less useful members of society than young men who have received the barest elements of education." The same editor concluded that "it is not profound learning which carries on the business of the world."

The same message appeared in the US and Scotland. "The great thinkers of today are outside of the Universities," quoted The *Normal Teacher* in 1879, and "practical businessmen" even thought college graduates needed to *unlearn* their education to succeed in business. A speech printed in 1900 in the *Edinburgh Review* stated, "History is full of the lives of men who have left behind them deep 'footprints on the sands of time' and yet who never had a university education."

To counter such skepticism, university presidents welded (and wielded) college study and economic mobility. They did so in what literacy researcher Tom Reynolds called a "tacit partnership" between magazines and universities. In twentieth-century articles, fiction, and advertisements, mass-readership magazines sold college literacy just as surely as they advertised hats and cleaning products.

Consider the case for a college degree promoted by Princeton president Francis Patton in a 1900 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Patton started by acknowledging skepticism: Those who go from "school to office," he conceded, do gain "certain advantages." Still, he went on, they will lack something "essential" that can be gained only in college. Plus, Patton argued, there would soon be no choice. In the future, the "most coveted places in the business and the social world" would only be accessible with a college education.

In other examples, magazines helped promote and explain the college experience by sharing details about campus life and curricula. They specifically provided writing advice and reading material used in English composition classrooms.

By 1915, Patton's prophesy seemed to have been fulfilled. In the education journal *School and Society*, Harvard president Charles Eliot (there he is again…!) wrote in 1915 that secondary learning was no longer sufficient: "The situation is completely changed to-day. For the earning of a good livelihood to-day the workman needs much more than the bare elements of reading, writing, and arithmetic."

In the same year, University of Maine President Robert Aley wrote:

Higher education is no longer the luxury of a few. Neither is it secured merely as a matter of culture. To the great majority of people higher education is simply more education and is sought because it is believed that its possession

will make the individual a more efficient member of the social world and will enable him more readily to meet the fierce competition of modern life.

The assured relationship between college literacy and economic mobility meant *correct writing* became an even more powerful gatekeeping tool in the twentieth century. Any number of secondary or college writing assignments and exams could exclude students from postsecondary learning and professional opportunities.

Today, there is no need to engineer an association between college education and employment. Any amount of college means more exposure to the far right of the writing continuum. Having some college education or a college degree almost always means higher earnings and less unemployment.[4] College study even follows generations, as having parents with some college education means statistically higher chances for economic stability College writing exams and courses continue to be lucrative enterprises for schools and testing organizations, who benefit from the association between college writing and economic success.

7.1.2 College and Workplace Writing Are "Worlds Apart"

Less clear, however, is the link between the actual writing done in college and in workplaces. For many instructors and students, college writing only happens at college, while workplace writing happens in the "real world." Indeed, many university faculty members are trained in academic writing and lack deep knowledge of workplace writing and how it differs from academic writing. By virtue of different experiences and goals, some postsecondary students know more than their instructors about writing beyond the far right of the continuum.

What happens, then, as students move from colleges to workplaces? In the twentieth century, writing researchers Chris Anson and Lee Forsberg observed a remarkably consistent pattern. Students went from "expectation" to "frustration" and finally to "accommodation." One new business intern described feeling "back at square one" in the process. He struggled with workplace writing, finding himself "too formal" at first and then "too touchy-feely" after that.

Similar observations left a group of faculty members dissatisfied with how universities were preparing graduates for workplace writing. They designed a large study to compare twenty-first-century college writing with that of workplaces. Ultimately, they found the differences between them so "radical" and "essential" that they titled their study *Worlds Apart*.

In 2020, a research team followed up the *Worlds Apart* study because they, too, saw students struggling to transition from college to workplace

writing. In their study, they found good news and bad news. The good news was that students' struggles led to new collaboration with coworkers. The bad news was that the responsibility to bridge college and workplace writing was falling to students, who were "left to find ways to transition between what might as well be different planets."

7.1.3 College and Workplace Writing Have Different Expectations

The metaphor of different worlds or planets is apt because college and workplace writing have different goals, cultures, and norms. These differences, manifest in everything from writing processes, to language patterns, to what it means to author a piece of writing.

College writing, for its part, is driven by epistemic goals such as taking a stance and showing knowledge, and it is common to hear people characterize academic writing as "objective" and "skeptical." Regardless of academic discipline, showed a study by Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki, university faculty expect writing characterized by "the dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perception."

We can identify how these characteristics connect to continuum patterns we've already seen. College writing tends toward the formal, impersonal, and informational end of the writing continuum. It tends to avoid broad generalizations, and to emphasize informational processes rather than personalized experiences and reactions.

These patterns do not mean college writing is "neutral." It conveys stance in patterns we've seen, such as hedges (*perhaps*) and boosters (*clearly*), as well as adjectives to show novelty and significance. But it does mean that readers of college writing expect relatively little interpersonal and personal language.

The specific institutional role of college writing matters, as well: It is often used to evaluate student learning and to sort and rank students. As it is conventionally carried out, graded student writing emphasizes obvious beginnings and endings (the start and end of a term) and single authors and readers (a single writer, and an instructor-reader). There are alternatives, such as collaborative writing assignments and writing in courses paired with community or professional organizations, but these are exceptions rather than the rule.

By contrast, workplace writing has transactional aims, such as securing clients or selling a service or product. The writing is rarely an end in itself (like the culmination of coursework), but rather supports a network of events, pieces of writing, relationships, and readers. It is regularly collaboratively authored, and its timelines change as needs and collaborations change.
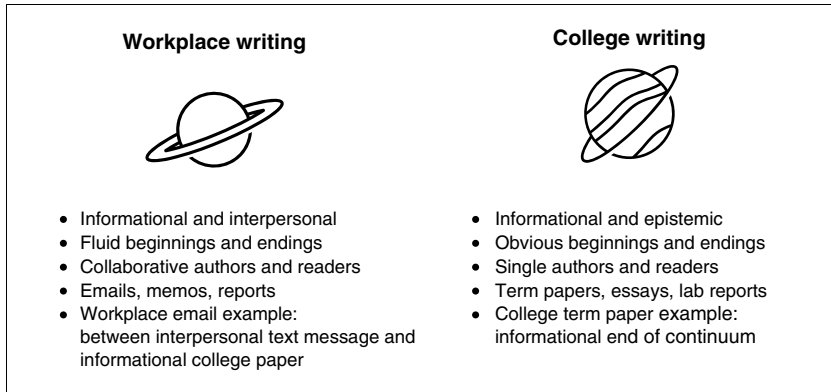
Figure 7.1 Workplace writing and college writing worlds

The most common workplace writing genre, email, prioritizes both informational and interpersonal goals and language patterns. It might share information such as specifications and directives, with attention to selective data reporting and arrangement. It might simultaneously fulfill interpersonal goals, including concern for others (what linguists called *positive politeness*) and attention to the need not to impose on others (*negative politeness*); generally, for example, workplace email includes explicit greetings and closings. At the same time, workplace email must attend to status relationships like boss to employee and vice versa, and so it is different than most informal digital writing.

In sum, while college writing prioritizes goals and patterns on the right side of the continuum, workplace writing often prioritizes patterns around the middle of the continuum. And while college writing tends to have finite deadlines and individual writers, workplace writing has more fluid timelines and collaborative authorship.

7.1.4 College and Workplace Writing Have Different Genres

With different goals and language patterns, college and workplace writing favor different genres (see Figure 7.1). Workplace and school survey responses show that essay writing is almost exclusively done in schools, for instance: While 65 percent of college respondents completed essay writing tasks, only 7 percent of workplace respondents had to write essays in their job.

In fact, only a fraction of the seventy-four different genres in the survey overlapped between college and workplace writing. Twenty genres were required more often in college writing than workplace writing. Fifteen were required more often in workplaces than colleges. And in that study and others, the most common workplace writing by a large margin was email, which was not reported as a college writing assignment genre.[5]

In her book *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language,* linguist Gretchen McCulloch describes four quadrants of contemporary English: informal speaking (e.g., conversations with friends), formal speaking (e.g., academic or professional presentations), informal writing (e.g., informal text messages or social media posts), and formal writing (e.g., academic papers). McCulloch places internet writing in the informal writing quadrant, due to its accessibility and focus on efficiency and spontaneity.

These quadrants highlight the productive diversity of English, but they also suggest that workplace email occupies a hybrid spot, more in between informal and formal writing than one or the other. Workplace email may not be fully accessible or spontaneous, but it is more accessible and spontaneous than formal academic writing. It fulfills informational as well as interpersonal goals, and it blends formal and informal language patterns. It dwells around the middle of the writing continuum, between text messaging and college writing. It might include formal interpersonal patterns such as conventional greetings and closings, informal interpersonal patterns such as emojis, and informational requests and directions.

The world of workplace writing presents new demands for writers transitioning to it. They might have practiced informational choices in college term papers, but they will need to use informational and interpersonal patterns in workplace email, which will vary according to workplace relationship and rank. Meanwhile, students may have only received feedback on their school writing, and they may not have received explicit instruction on what makes college writing different from workplace writing. Technical or professional college writing courses may offer that kind of explicit instruction, and they are growing in number. But to date these courses are rarely required, and not always available, in university curricula.

Whether or not students receive explicit instruction in email writing, university faculty do have strong feelings about it. Online advice – and complaints – suggest lecturers and professors much prefer formal, informational writing norms in their emails from students, including *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences.[6]

7.1.5 Learning Is Linked to Some Writing Tasks

The fact that college and workplace writing are different doesn't mean college writing is not valuable. It means college writing does not explicitly prepare students for workplace writing, even as it may contribute to their learning overall.

How exactly college writing contributes to learning is not easy to determine, because we can't isolate writing from other parts of learning. Mixed observations may also be inevitable: They all depend on what counts as *writing* and *learning* at a given time and place; and they are influenced by tasks, peers, teachers, disciplines, and extracurricular interests. Still, research offers a few observations.

Some studies show that more college writing means more student satisfaction, but not necessarily higher student achievement. Other research suggests that across their years of college, students develop as writers, in two ways. First, students develop in a nonlinear fashion. This won't surprise us, as we know from myth 6 that writing development is a spiral, not a line. And second, students develop toward more knowledge domains, which won't surprise us because we know from myth 3 that writing entails cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and health domains.

Other research shows a correlational relationship between some kinds of writing and learning, meaning we can picture the two – select college writing, and student learning – like two seats on a tandem bicycle. Some college writing appears to help students develop understanding, because students have to conceptualize and connect ideas to write about them. And learning appears to help students develop some of their writing, because as they learn, students develop more vocabulary, details, and connections they can use in their writing.

A large study of US college writing led by Paul Anderson specifically showed that learning was connected to three kinds of writing practice:

- Writing tasks with clear expectations
- Interactive writing processes (with collaborative feedback, discussion, and revision)
- Meaning-making projects (or working with new or original ideas)

In other words, all writing tasks are not created equal, but some writing tasks do contribute to student learning. That means mixed results in writing research may be related to the type of writing in question. Standardized writing tasks with no interaction, for instance, do not appear to enhance student learning, even if they do impact student access and therefore employment.

7.2 The Myth Emerges

Beginning with messages deliberately linking college education and economic opportunity, this myth emerged. Today, it is bolstered by the connection between college education and economic outcomes, and the tandem relationship between student learning and some college writing. But the mythical idea that college writing ensures professional success obscures important truths: College and workplace writing are different, and writers need explicit support to transition between them.

7.3 Consequences of the Myth

7.3.1 We Limit Bridges between Writing Worlds

An overall consequence of this myth is that we limit bridges between writing worlds. With limited bridges come other consequences noted in Table 7.1.

7.3.2 Workplace Writing Is a Sink or Swim Scenario

Without bridging experience between academic and workplace writing, students face the transition between these writing worlds without explicit support. The authors of *Worlds Apart* call this "jumping into the rhetorical pool and swimming."

Rhetorical sinking or swimming means means trial and error is the only way to learn what makes college and workplace writing similar and different. Even more important, sink or swim chances are not equitable. They depend upon individual resources in moments of need. Those most likely to swim are those with life preservers and swimming communities, who may feel sufficiently entitled to support to ask for it. Those likely to sink are those without resources or communities already oriented toward swimming. To belabor the metaphor: Those with the most swimming

Table 7.1 Consequences of myth 7

Once we believe	
College writing ensures professional success, then…	… Workplace writing is a sink or swim scenario
	… College curricula and tests are limited
	… Students struggle to transition between worlds
	… Students who do not attend college are at a disadvantage
	… We believe college education is worth any cost

resources are most likely to swim, no matter how capable everyone is of swimming *with* instruction. Sinking opportunity for people who would swim if supported to do so, in other words, is a serious consequence.

Lest I keep us treading water forever (ha, ha), let's illustrate this point in terms of writing. Research shows significant differences between student writers who are first in their families to attend college (first-generation students), and students whose parents attended college (continuing-generation students). These differences don't relate to college performance or ability, as measured in student GPA and course grades. Instead, the differences have to do with what students believe about themselves and how much support and time they have. First-generation students report a higher level of self-doubt in their college reading and writing. They are less likely to have disposable time and resources; they are more likely to have responsibilities such as work and family obligations; and they are more likely to leave college before finishing their degree. Even with college performance beginning similarly, students' self-perceptions and their time and other school-related resources directly influence the writing they are able to do.

When there is no clear bridge between college and workplace writing, then opportunity is not equally available. It will most likely go to those with more time, more practice with relevant kinds of writing, or more practice asking for help with writing. Unequal opportunity is a dire consequence, in other words, of assuming that writers will adapt to new writing tasks without explicit support.

7.3.3 College Curricula and Tests Are Limited

Isolated from workplace and other "real world" writing, college writing commonly takes the form of individual writing, in academic genres, with informational, formal, impersonal language patterns. That is the kind of writing most college faculty members are trained to assign and to write themselves. Even if students need to write around the middle of the continuum after college, college instructors know the most about the right side of the continuum.

The emphasis on individual assignments in college courses, based on how we've evaluated ability since the emergence of myths 3 and 4, particularly contrasts the collaborative expectations of workplace writing. Students may write collaborative digital texts out of school, but in school they rarely gain practice in or feedback on collaborative authorship.

This common version of *correct college writing* is limiting. The Penn State University website passage that opens the chapter, for instance, begins thus: "In a technologically driven world, many students no longer

see writing as a relevant skill to their career path." Implicit in this either/ or framing – either technology *or* writing – is that digital writing on the left of the continuum is not part of the "relevant skill" of writing.

7.3.4 Students Struggle to Transition between Worlds

This myth implies that the transition between postsecondary and workplace writing will happen without bridges between them. But as we saw in myth 6, transitioning between writing situations is not easy. It is hard to move from one writing context to another, particularly without explicit attention to their similarities and differences.

7.3.5 Students Who Do not Attend College Are at a Disadvantage

The correlation between postsecondary education and employment today is real. Whether or not students practice the three kinds of writing related to learning and development (clear expectations, interactive processes, and working with original ideas), they are still likely to hear that college writing will help them professionally. And even with college and workplace writing worlds being apart, people are likely to face this myth when they try to get jobs.

Consider this 2021 BBC news story, "Improving my literacy helped me get a different job."[7] The article tells the story of James Sykes, who describes how in secondary school he viewed writing only in terms of boring and irrelevant exams. At the age of forty, he took his GCSE English exam and was awarded a B, which the article suggests will help him at the Territorial Army. Sykes explains why this will help him: "It's a tick in the box that you've got to have to allow you to progress," he notes, "so it will potentially help me in the future with my military career." Sykes' reasoning is sincere, but it doesn't concern learning or writing development.

This myth lasts so long as workplace employees are judged according to *correct writing*. Consider this response from a contemporary employer asked about *correct writing errors* in job applications: "I tend to think that the person who writes poorly is both poorly educated and not interested in improving their skills. I also think that the person is perhaps not the most qualified person for the job."

The upshot here is that the disadvantage for students without college writing is real, because of how people *think* about college writing – not necessarily because college writing will prepare them for workplace writing.

7.3.6 We Believe College Is "Worth it at any Cost"

Today, there is evidence of skepticism about the value of a college education. In 2022, for example, a coalition of US public universities began a campaign to "prove college is worth it." To *Inside Higher Education*, the campaign indicated that "the belief in a college degree as a stepping-stone to social mobility, once nearly universal, is fading."[8]

So long as this myth persists, however, it easily fuels the idea that college is worth it at any cost. Meanwhile, college education presents extreme financial and other challenges for many families, particularly in the US where college debt is notoriously high. A US economist recently put it this way: "Much of the student debt weighing down millions of Americans can be attributed to false promises."

7.4 Closer to the Truth

7.4.1 Postsecondary Writing Is not Workplace Writing

For more than a century, this myth has linked college writing and employability. Closer to the truth is that certain kinds of college writing help student learning, but this doesn't mean postsecondary writing will be the same as workplace writing, or that students have learned strategies for transitioning between them.

7.4.2 Workplace Writing and Speaking Matter

Employer surveys reported in *Education Weekly* show that many employers emphasize both oral and written communication skills. A representative example appears in the American Management Association's 2010 Critical Skills Survey, which identified "effective communication," or "the ability to synthesize and transmit your ideas both in written and oral formats," as one of the four central skills employers value. There is good reason to help college students see where college writing is on the continuum, and understand how it is similar to and different from communication they will need to do later.

7.4.3 Writing Is Context-specific

As we've seen several times already, different writing tasks entail different writing choices. It is for this reason that the authors of *Worlds Apart* describe "the tremendous power of context" in shaping college and workplace writing.

This means that students need practice in workplaces to develop workplace writing. Full practice in workplace writing only happens over time, in workplace contexts, with the help of feedback and guidance. Just as there is no way to teach college writing in secondary school, there is no way to teach workplace writing in college classrooms, because classrooms and workplaces are not the same contexts. What we can do is consider changes and bridges.

7.4.4 Higher Education Can Change

The fact that writing is context-specific does not mean that college and workplace writing have to stay worlds apart. One way instructors have brought them closer together is by tailoring college writing courses to students' workplace needs. In "needs-driven" writing courses, instructors determine students' workplace requirements and design courses accordingly, using examples and assignments specific to the genres and fields students are pursuing. Needs-driven instruction is not always possible, because it depends on the student make-up and what students and instructors know when the course begins.

More generally, college writing courses can incorporate a wider range of college writing assignments. More college writing tasks could include collaborative as well as individual authorship, and interpersonal as well as informational goals, to give students practice with a range of writing choices. This would allow students to practice writing choices valued in workplace as well as academic tasks, and it could help build greater awareness across the two. Furthermore, writing research shows that even aside from future writing demands, there are benefits to collaborative writing, including enhancing students' learning and understanding.

Higher education representatives could also do a better job of accurately portraying what college does and does not offer, for the sake of informed choices about college attendance. New economic mobility index rankings, for instance, already add nuance to the message that college is worth it at any cost.[9] This index ranks schools according to how long it typically takes students after graduation to recoup the costs of college. In addition, administrators and instructors can provide more details about differences between college and workplace writing, and how college writers fare when they enter workplaces. Writing courses can provide more bridge-building in instruction and assignments.

7.4.5 We Can Build Metacognitive Bridges

Building metacognitive bridges by analyzing different kinds of writing seems the most flexible solution. In the last myth, we saw that explicit instruction and reflection can build metacognitive bridges between secondary and college writing. The same idea applies here, between college and workplace writing.

Closer to the truth is that those students who can recognize differences between college and workplace writing have an easier time moving from one to the other. In the *Worlds Apart* follow-up study, for instance, a student who successfully moved from college writing to internship writing described how she first learned how to conduct concise analysis in an Environmental Ethics course in college. Then, with the help of reflecting on how the writing was similar and different, she applied some of the same choices in her internship at the Environmental Protections Agency.

In this example, the student reflected on her own writing to build a metacognitive bridge between two kinds of writing. Both required focus and cohesion choices related to picking and prioritizing information, but each one also had some unique language patterns. College courses can support this kind of analysis, building bridges across different parts of the writing continuum.

Recalling that we know writing development occurs in a spiral across a lifespan, we can see repeated analysis opportunities as ongoing bridge building. With ongoing opportunities, writers can reflect on language patterns in college and workplace writing such as those in Table 7.2 to help them discern what to apply and leave behind in each one.

7.4.6 Workplace and College Writing Are on a Writing Continuum

We'll build metacognitive bridges here by comparing a workplace email and a student executive summary from an undergraduate business program. Both are exemplar texts offered online to support writers: One was a 2022 example for successful workplace emailing,[10] and one was a 2022 exemplar model used at the University of Technology Sydney.[11] Together, they allow us to explore different parts of the continuum: workplace email around the middle left of the continuum, with interpersonal and informational patterns, and college writing toward the formal, informational, impersonal side of the continuum.

Table 7.2 Workplace email to postsecondary writing continuum

Texting Social   **Email**   **Secondary**   **College**   **Published**

Postsecondary and Workplace Writing Continuum Patterns
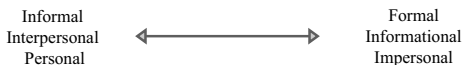
	Informal Interpersonal Personal ←→ Formal Informational Impersonal	
Continuum Purposes	**Exemplar email:** **Top Google example for workplace email**	**Exemplar paper:** **Model executive summary of management decisions**
Cohesion	• **Hourglass organization** Clear moves from opening greeting, to sharing information and requesting meeting, to closing	• **Hourglass organization and rhetorical moves** Clear introductory moves and paragraphs detailing the report's purpose, methods, conclusions, and recommended actions
Connection	• **Interpersonal connection** Collective 1st person *(our)* and direct 2nd person address	• **Informational connection** No 1st or 2nd person pronouns
Focus	• **Informational and interpersonal subjects** Sentence subjects include 1st person pronouns and simple, general nouns Active and passive verbs	• **Informational subjects** Subjects include nouns and dense noun phrases focused on organizations, systems, and processes More passive verbs
Stance	• **Certain stance** Boosters and generalizations emphasize collective and positive tone *(very good, all of us)*, and hedging anticipates possible problems *(in general)*	• **Neutral stance** Boosters and hedges balance assertion with caution *(readily, might, could)* No generalizations
Usage	• C*orrect writing* conventions and usage preferences	• C*orrect writing* conventions and usage preferences
Opening	Dear Team:	This report provides an analysis and evaluation of dysfunctional performance measurement.

The examples appear in full below, annotated according to continuum purposes and patterns. Marginal notes and annotations include transitional words **in bold**, connection markers [in brackets], *hedges* in italics, ***boosters*** and ***generalizations*** italicized and bolded, and passive verbs [[in double brackets]].

7.4.6.1 Workplace Email Example

Subject Line: Departmental Changes
 Dear Team:
 Good morning. There are some *exciting* changes coming to our department that I wish to alert [you] to.

> **Formal, interpersonal connection, hourglass cohesion:**
> This email formally but directly greets readers and signals what is to come

 Due to ABC Inc.'s recent acquisition of XYZ Company, [our] executive management has decided that some restructuring of [our department] is in order so that [our transition] through this merger can be as seamless *as possible*.

> **Interpersonal connection, informational focus:**
> The writer evokes a collective experience without focusing on the writer's reaction

 This is, ***in general***, ***very good*** news for ***all*** [of us], for [we] will be onboarding ten new sales representatives – which will both relieve [our] current understaffing situation and prepare [us] for the heightened sales operations this merger is anticipated to trigger.

> **Generalized, certain stance:**
> The writer offers a generalized, positive evaluation of the collective experience

 [I] am scheduling a staff meeting for tomorrow from 12 pm to 1 pm where [I] will outline the steps of this important transition; lunch [[will be provided]].

> **Informational, interpersonal invitation:**
> The writer uses first person and passive verbs to extend an invitation while remaining impersonal

(You) Please feel free to reach out to [me] at **any** time during the next few weeks with **any** questions or concerns.

> **Interpersonal connection, hourglass cohesion, certain stance:** The writer closes with a direct, polite invitation and boosted emphasis on availability

Best regards,
Julie Adams
Email: email@ABCinc.com
Phone: 555–555–1234

7.4.6.2 Postsecondary Writing Example

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of dysfunctional performance measurement. The issue of a lack of controllability breaches the controllability principle, and this report examines the accountability of factors and fairness of their responsibility. Performance measurement is defined as a quantifiable indicator used to assess how well an organisation or business is achieving its desired objectives. *Many* business managers *routinely* review various performance measure types to assess such factors as results, production, demand and operating efficiency in order to acquire a more objective sense of how their business is operating and whether improvement is required.

> **Explicit cohesion, informational, impersonal focus, certain stance:** The opening follows introductory moves (contribution, territory, gap), and includes two boosters that emphasize the importance of the contribution

By analysing the cause of the problem, the report discusses four categories of uncontrollable factors: (1) external environmental; (2) decisions taken by others within the same company; (3) decisions taken by superiors and (4) inability to change the decision. The report then examines the consequences of dysfunctional performance management for both individuals and organisations. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) scandal in the USA is

> **Explicit cohesion, informational focus, balanced stance:** These paragraphs move from topics (factors discussed) to examples to analysis (goals and

discussed as an example of organisational practice. The aim is to apply theory to the case and explore *possible solutions* to the problems. Due to a multitude of factors responsible for the VA *scandal*, this report focuses on the problem of uncontrollability and management systems issues in the organisation.

> findings). Dense noun phrases focus on information, and sentences include hedges and boosters

The report finds that, although there is *no single solution* to overcoming issues such as lack of controllability in performance measurement, this phenomenon **can actually** render positive effects on management. The conclusion is that organisations **should** determine the level of uncontrollability that is permissible for achieving their objectives.

The recommendations in this report detail the importance of selecting appropriate indicators to accomplish the organisation's objectives together with establishing properly designed management control systems (MCS).

> **Informational focus:**
> The summary closes with impersonal, dense noun phrases focused on information

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Both examples build cohesion through paragraphs and moves, even as the specific moves are different. Likewise, both texts connect with their audience, but differently: The workplace email uses direct, personalized address to emphasize shared work experiences (*for all of us*), and the report summary uses formal, impersonal patterns to emphasize what the text offers to readers (*this report provides*). Along similar lines, the sentence subjects are simple and text-external in the workplace email (*our executive management; This*). In the report summary, as in other writing toward the right of the continuum, the sentence subjects and objects are more compressed and informational (*the issue of a lack of controllability; the accountability of factors and fairness of their responsibility*).

Both texts also convey author stance, with the email offering a clearly positive description of workplace developments, and the report offering a balanced stance that anticipates reader doubts (*although there is no single solution …, this phenomenon can actually*). Both texts follow *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences, though the email is more informal and interpersonal than the report summary. Overall, the language patterns make for a workplace email that is personalized, interpersonal, and informational, and a college report summary that is impersonal and informational.

Closer to the truth is that while this myth implies a direct connection between college and workplace writing, we have seen a more mixed picture:

- College education leads more often to employment than secondary education alone
- Some postsecondary writing assignments contribute to student learning
- Some people expect *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences in workplace applications
- College and workplace writing are different in their goals, genres, and language patterns
- It is challenging to transition between college and workplace writing, especially without explicit attention to similarities and differences between them

Closer to the truth is that without bridging the worlds of college and workplace writing, students are thrown into rhetorical pools without equitable support. Alternatively, diverse assignments and explicit attention to similarities and differences can support metacognitive bridges.

Our final myth will give us more opportunity to explore the writing continuum, and a chance to address the myth I hear most of all: New technology, especially the internet, threatens writing.