

CHAPTER EIGHT

Myth 8 You Can't Write That Because Internet

Or, New Technology Threatens Writing

The following headlines span about fifty years: earlier claims about television, and later claims about texting and the internet.

- The High Linguistic Crimes Committed by Television's Newscasters Have Impoverished the Richest Language in the World. *The New York Times*, US, 1974
- [After] Television Turned our Minds into Cucumbers, the Written Word Has Been in Decline. *The Washington Star*, US, 1975
- Television [leads to] Aborted Literacy. *The Guardian*, UK, 1978
- Watching TV Harms Kids' Academic Success. *New Scientist*, US, 2005
- Text Message Slang Invading GCSEs and A-levels as Teenagers Abandon Basic Grammar and Punctuation. *Daily Mail*, UK, 2012
- The Internet Is Making Writing Worse. *The Atlantic*, US, 2013

In these headlines, the culprit changes, but the myth remains: New technology threatens writing – luring people away from *correct writing* until there's no saving it.

Versions of this myth are a bit of an occupational hazard for me. People hear “professor of English” and immediately want to talk about whether anyone cares about writing any more (yes), or whether people will soon communicate using only emojis (no). And so on.¹

Interestingly, these conversations tend to be about *other* people, because the people who voice the myth have not suffered its fate. My undergraduate students don't worry for themselves, but they worry for their younger siblings. My friends write formal reports and send informal texts, but they fear their children won't be able to do both.

There are some headlines that tell people not to worry. A 2014 study showed that British and Australian students kept informal texting and formal papers separate, and it was featured in *Vox* under the headline “OMG! Texting doesn't actually hurt kids' grammar or spelling skills,” and in *The Conversation* with the title “Text-messaging isn't, like, ruining young people's grammar.” These articles aren't free of myths – they imply informal language is *incorrect* and lacking *grammar*. But they do

not say that new technology ruins writing, and they employ a range of language patterns in their titles, besides.

Most headlines about new technologies, however, are myth bonanzas. They go something like this: *Correct writing*, which is one thing only, should be regulated by schools and tests, and when most students cannot write *correctly* according to schools and tests, it is because they are using new technologies. In the opening passages, for instance, the 1975 article blames low SAT scores on TV, and the 2012 article says text messages are lowering GCSE and A-level scores.

Like other writing we've explored, digital writing, the contemporary focus of this myth, is not all the same. It varies according to platforms, writers, purposes, and relationships. But relative to *correct writing* on the right end of the continuum, informal digital writing has some broad similarities, if we define it as writing commonly used in informal social media and text messaging.

Recent as these technologies are, our tale begins with an age-old story: New technology scares people.

8.1 Context for the myth

8.1.1 New Technology Comes with Old Concerns

In the eighteenth century, people feared that the printing press would lower writing standards. In the nineteenth century, people argued the telegraph and telephone would harm literacy. In the twentieth century, people worried about television, then instant messaging and chat rooms. Today, people are concerned about texting and the internet. These claims are part of a long tradition: When a new communicative technology emerges, people express concerns about literacy. (They often proceed to use the new technologies to air those concerns, but I digress.)

Like other myths we've seen, this one follows the trend of *more access/more regulation*. The printing press made reading and writing more widely accessible, which worried government and church leaders who had hitherto controlled what was written, printed, and read. Coverage in the 1970s connected a literacy crisis to television and increased college access, particularly for people of color and women. Coverage today implies that the internet, which widens access to writing and information, undermines *correct writing*.

This isn't to say there are no legitimate concerns about new technologies, but rather that it is hard to parse them from fear of change and increased access. Headlines commonly express what Christian Thurlow

describes as “moral panic” about “the communicative ineptitude of young people.” Many imply that democratizing writing weakens or taints it.

There are more positive views, from linguists who praise the innovative creativity of online language, and from writing educators who describe the internet’s role in a supporting literacy. Both positive and negative coverage show interest in language. Still, the most common response is language regulation mode – specifically, alarm over perceived writing decline.

8.1.2 *Correct writing* Is Kept Separate from Informal Writing

The 2012 *Atlantic* article “The Internet Is Making Writing Worse” reports a common fear: Digital writing makes students more likely to perform “academic atrocities” like “using informal language.” The article is based on an online survey of about 2,500 secondary teachers in the US, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. In the survey, most teachers agreed that digital writing fostered creativity and expression, but they also worried about the boundary between informal and formal language.² Many responses used invasion or takeover metaphors, as though digital language were a slang-slinging militia out to get formal writing.

A key premise is that *correct writing* is formal, and digital writing is informal, and never the two should meet. As we saw in myth 1, this division dominates university writing advice for students. The University of Sydney, for instance, describes, “Academic writing is generally quite formal, objective (impersonal) and technical. It is formal by avoiding casual or conversational language, such as contractions or informal vocabulary.”³ Academic usage guides show similar consensus about formality. They say writers should avoid a “casual” or “conversational” style, including unattended pronouns (*this means* versus *this rule means*), split infinitives, sentence-initial conjunctions, sentence-ending prepositions, and contractions. The total effect of advice about English academic writing, wrote K. Bennet after studying academic style guides, implies it is a “massive impersonal machine” that is “by nature formal.” In turn, *Time* magazine writer Kim Bubello cautions, “The formal, unemotional writing we were all taught in the classroom simply won’t do in places designed for virtual mingling.”⁴

8.2 The Myth Emerges

Reinforcing other myths, this myth emerges. Myth 8 continues to limit *correct writing* to one kind of writing, regulated by schools and tests. It

furthermore puts *correct writing* at odds with new technologies, especially today's digital writing technologies.

8.3 Consequences of the Myth

8.3.1 We Keep Limiting *Writing*

When we pit new technologies against *correct writing*, we continue to lose opportunities for language exploration, bringing us full circle back to myth 1. We continue to judge more, and learn less, about writing. We get a host of specific consequences listed in Table 8.1 as a result.

8.3.2 We Make Enemies of Informal and *Correct* Writing

This myth keeps the left and right side of the writing continuum disconnected and opposed to one another. From limited preferences in usage guides, to limited tasks and criteria in schools and tests, *correct writing* appears in a hierarchy, at the top, instead of on a connected continuum.

In turn, we keep more common, familiar writing at odds with *correct writing*. And we expect students to perform their learning only in the least familiar, most inflexible writing on the continuum, no matter how meaningful the rest of the continuum.

A dichotomy between “personal” and “academic” writing sometimes reinforces the same divide, for example, in school curricula that moves from “creative and personal narrative” in the beginning to “formal argument” at the end. This order and terminology can imply that personal narrative is a step in a linear process of informal to formal writing development, rather than important for its own purposes and part of a connected set of language choices.

Table 8.1 Consequences of myth 8

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|---|--|
| <p>Once we believe New technology threatens writing, then...</p> | <p>... We make enemies of informal and <i>correct</i> writing</p> <p>... We believe only <i>correct writing</i> is <i>controlled</i> writing</p> <p>... We view language diversity as bad</p> <p>... We tolerate (even more) confusing references to grammar</p> <p>... We limit our responses to artificial intelligence</p> <p>... We limit audiences and learning</p> |
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8.3.3 We Believe Only *Correct Writing Is Controlled Writing*

This myth puts a new spin on the *control* metaphors we saw in myth 5, by implying that people lose control of *correct writing* after being lured by new technologies. The 1978 *Guardian* article warned that literacy was “aborted” due to television. The 2012 *Daily Mail* article suggested that “basic grammar and punctuation” were “abandoned” by teenagers writing text messages. These messages imply that *correct writing* is both entirely separate from, and left behind by, the use of new technologies.

8.3.4 We View Language Change and Diversity as Bad, rather than Inevitable and Positive

By the logic of this myth, *correct writing* must not be influenced by the language variety or change that comes with new technologies. Thus language adaptation becomes a bad thing, instead of inevitable and productive. Instead of exploring what makes informal digital writing what it is, we view informal digital writing as a threat.

8.3.5 We Tolerate (even more) Confusing References to Grammar

References to informal digital writing as having *no grammar* are examples of how language regulation mode can reinforce language ignorance. First, as with other examples we’ve seen, many said references actually refer to conventions – spelling or punctuation – rather than grammar. Second, many examples of informal digital usage, such as emojis, exaggerations, and the use of phrases rather than clauses (or complete sentences), are all grammatically possible and meaningful choices in English. Like formal writing patterns, they show cohesion, connection, focus, stance, and usage, but differently.

8.3.6 We Limit our Responses to Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools have alarmed educators for years, but perhaps none more than the ChatGPT AI tool that emerged at the end of 2022.⁵ ChatGPT is an open access tool that uses scores of linguistic data to produce writing eerily like human writing. In the months after its appearance, secondary and postsecondary educators expressed the concern that students would cheat without detection, and even that the tool would replace educators.

These responses are understandable, but some are also limited, more focused on language regulation than exploration. Without taking away

from important discussions about AI, ethics, and authorship, we can also choose language exploration as one approach to AI-generated writing. In support of metacognitive bridge building, students can critically analyze patterns in AI writing, and where they fall on the continuum, just as they do with human writing.

For instance, AI writing relies on formulaic templates like the ones in myth 6, because templates are easy to identify at scale. If you ask ChatGPT to “write a paper on linguistic features of internet English,” for example, you will get a five-paragraph essay, with an introduction stating a thesis, three body paragraphs describing one example each, and a conclusion restating the thesis and making a generalization about the internet or English. As part of understanding cohesion, students can analyze these moves, compare them to human writing, consider how the writing could be more flexibly organized, and so on. Likewise, analyzing AI writing for how it builds (or fails to build) connection can highlight the limitations of AI, which does not possess human interpersonal or intrapersonal awareness. Because AI tools can parse information into segments but not process information like humans, its connection patterns can be blunted, creating opportunities for recognizing and revising according to purpose.

The upshot is: The more writers analyze writing across the continuum (whether it be their own, AI writing, or writing they hope to do one day), the more chances they have to build metacognitive bridges. Meanwhile, AI will only keep developing. The better we become at exploring it, the better prepared we will be to recognize and use it for learning.

8.3.7 We Limit Audiences and Learning

Keeping *correct writing* and informal digital writing at odds ultimately limits writing audiences and writing knowledge. It means formal writing will remain inaccessible to many audiences. And it means fewer bridges, and less explicit learning, across the full writing continuum.

8.4 Closer to the Truth

8.4.1 Writing Is a Scapegoat (or, It's Complicated)

Before directly responding to this myth, we should note that some responses to new technologies are not necessarily about writing. Some are rooted in understandable but distinct social concerns, and some are about many worries at once. *Correct writing* is often a repository for a range of concerns.

For instance, some fears about student internet writing relate to social behaviors. Studies show that excessive use of digital technology can make students less motivated and more anxious, and can replace interactive communication. Important though they are, these observations pertain more to relational behaviors than to language use within them.⁶ On the flip side, digital technologies sometimes facilitate positive social behaviors. At one university, more than half the students felt university social media helped them to feel part of their academic community. But again, that finding appeared more related to social behavior than to specific language use.

In another example, the spread of misinformation is a pressing issue of our time. But misinformation is not specifically about writing, insofar as *correct* and *incorrect writing* can both spread misinformation.

Other concerns relate to contemporary encounters with writing, if not writing itself. Nicholas Carr's well-known claim that "Google is making us stupid," for instance, is based on his decreasing attention span when reading online. Recent research does suggest that collective attention is decreasing, with popular content accelerating and diminishing in shortening intervals. And research on media multitasking (using two or more media at once) shows that such multitasking interferes with attention and working memory.

An additional view of encounters with writing is that the internet creates a more flexible view of language. In *Because Internet*, McCulloch argues that before the internet, language was seen as fixed, slow to change, and controlled by distant authorities. Now, she argues, language is seen as fluid and collectively negotiated.

As for writing itself, closer to the truth is that *how* people use digital technologies seems to matter more than *whether* they do. A study of undergraduates showed that students who used their phones to shift their attention away from class lectures – to receive or send an unrelated text message, for example – remembered little. But those students who used their phones to write lecture notes recalled about as much as students who turned off their phones. Research on language learning classrooms likewise shows that what makes the difference is *how*, not *whether*, new technologies are used.

8.4.2 More Claims Are Proffered than Proven

Also closer to the truth is that it is easier to say new technologies threaten writing than it is to prove it. Multiple forces affect new technologies and writing, making them hard to disentangle, and many generalizations cannot be proven one way or the other. Many headlines based on standardized test scores, for example, go from "students use informal punctuation" to "students cannot write," and then they say that digital writing

is the culprit. Likewise, many accounts evoking this myth use anecdotal or selective evidence, which might all be true but is not generalizable.

Also closer to the truth is that writing is not changing substantially due to digital writing. Academic writing does not include significantly more abbreviations or slang than in the past, for instance, and no research shows changes in fundamental grammatical structures such as the subject-verb-object construction that we read about in myth 1. Only a very small (but much-discussed) percentage of student writing contains abbreviations and other digitally mediated language patterns. A national US study of college writing in 2008 directly contradicted “hard-core worriers who see a precipitous decline in student writing ability” based on digital writing. Instead, the study suggested college students are capable of keeping parts of the continuum separate when they write. Other research, in 2015 and since, argues that students make a conscious effort to avoid informal internet language in academic writing.

8.4.3 If it Surprises You, You Notice it More

One reason people think writing is dramatically changing is because new usage is noticeable, even when it accounts for a small proportion of language use. This is akin to what scientists call perceptual salience. Surprising language use will call our attention more than unsurprising language patterns, and that can make this myth can seem true.

By way of example, a reader concerned about texting language – perhaps after reading media headlines about it – is much more likely to dwell on two uses of *idkw* (*I don't know why*) in a student paper than on the 798 other words (for instance) that have been around for decades, arranged in a grammatical order of subject-verb-object that has been around for centuries.

Closer to the truth is that even proportionally small choices can feel frequent, and it is common to overstate the extent of language change and difference. Steeped in a 150-year history of writing myths, we may particularly notice what doesn't conform to *correct writing*. We end up, again, with language regulation mode focused on error, rather than language exploration of diverse writing patterns.

8.4.4 *Correct Writing* Is Expected to Be Formal and Is Disliked for Being Formal

Even as students regularly hear that *correct writing* should be formal and detached, it is criticized for the same – for being “impersonal,” “dry,” and “stodgy.” Helen Sword's *Stylish Academic Writing* describes most

academic writing as “bland.” Steven Pinker’s *Sense of Style* advises writers to avoid writing too academically. Here we can see resonances with the Plain English movements discussed in myth 1, which strive to make writing more accessible but sometimes can’t escape language regulation mode. Still, Sword’s project began by exploring patterns in several pieces of formal writing, and she recommends considering occasional informal patterns, such as second-person pronouns.

8.4.5 Informal Is not the Same as Careless

Iterations of this myth imply that digital writing is careless. For instance, “The Internet is Making Writing Worse” reported that 68 percent of teachers said that digital tools made students “more likely to take shortcuts and not put effort into their writing,” while 46 percent said that digital tools made students more likely to “write too fast and be careless.”

A couple of considerations get us closer to the truth. One is that the survey presumed a direct relationship between digital writing and fast, careless writing – rather than, for instance, between timed standardized exams and careless writing. In the same survey, more than half the teachers said digital technologies increase the likelihood that students would revise and edit their work. Teens said the same thing in their own survey.⁷ A majority of the teachers furthermore responded that digital technologies made students more creative and collaborative in their writing.

Another consideration is that some research reports thoughtful attention in digital writing, particularly for certain audiences. My own students echo this: Every term, I poll them about whether they sometimes revise their text messages, and all of them say they do.

Closer to the truth is that writing across the continuum can be done quickly and without thought, or with time and thoughtful revision. Furthermore, the informal writing on the continuum is not separate from the formal writing: All writing on the continuum shares some purposes and norms, and includes sliding degrees of interpersonal to informational, informal to formal, and personal to impersonal language patterns.

Also closer to the truth is that informal English has long been important for language users, providing unique opportunities for meaning, connection, and innovation. In 1883, Walt Whitman called slang “the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time.” One hundred and thirty years later, researchers called text messages creative approximations of conversations, full of innovative idioms, puns, and other word play.

Indeed, one distinguishing characteristic of informal digital writing is that it allows for more flexible and innovative usage. For example, the

use of *because* as a preposition, as I've used it in this myth title, is relatively new and informal – and rather a breakthrough innovation, since prepositions belong to a closed lexical category that doesn't get new members very often. The same myth title on the right of the continuum would be something like *you cannot write that because of the nature of the internet, which is informal*, in which the use of *because of* is more traditional and less innovative.

8.4.6 The Ends of the Writing Continuum Are Fundamentally Similar

When we believe that new technology threatens writing, it is easy to overlook norms used across the writing continuum, from informal digital writing on the left to formal published writing on the right. One shared grammatical norm discussed in myth 1 is subject-verb-object order. Our earlier example of *idkw* might be used in informal digital writing, while a similar statement in formal academic writing might be *Contemporary research is unclear regarding why*. Both use the subject-verb-object structure of English, even as the digital example uses interpersonal, informal first person and abbreviations, and the academic writing includes an informational focus and *correct writing* conventions.

Likewise, while slang is more likely on the left side of the continuum, new words, including slang, follow morphological processes used across the continuum. *Okayest* was one informal example we saw in myth 1, and we'll add another here: *hangry*. *Hangry* (*hungry* + *angry*) is more likely in writing on the left of the continuum. But it follows the morphological process of blending (combining two words by clipping one or both), just like the words *malware* (*malicious* + *software*) and *Brexit* (*Britain* + *exit*) that we find on the right side of the continuum.

8.4.7 The Ends of the Writing Continuum Use Similar Features, Differently

Rules like “don't use *I* in academic writing” imply that language features used on one end of the continuum are not used on the other end. Yet as we saw in the introduction and myth 1, first-person pronouns are used across the continuum, just differently.

Like first-person pronouns, punctuation and capitalization regularly appear in usage guides and they, too, are used across the writing continuum, but differently. In informal digital writing, punctuation, capitalization, and emojis are regularly used to show stance and build connection

and cohesion.⁸ In formal academic writing, punctuation and capitalization are also used to build cohesion, and to follow usage norms for breaking up information into grammatical units.

For instance, if I'm writing on the left of the continuum, following informal digital writing norms on social media, I could write: *Writing patterns are SO FASCINATING!!! ☺*. In that sentence, the informal, interpersonal uses of capitalization, punctuation, and an emoji prioritize sharing my enthusiasm with others. Those choices are complemented by the balance of lexical categories: one simple noun phrase (*writing patterns*), a verb, an adjective, and an adverb.

In this book, though, you expect a more informational sentence, such as: *Writing patterns highlight intriguing similarities and differences across shared language use*. In that sentence, my capitalization, punctuation, and dense noun phrases prioritize formal, impersonal information sharing, rather than sharing my enthusiasm. As you know already, formal academic writing hearts nouns, so all the nouns won't surprise you. But here again, both examples use the subject-verb-object construction.

8.4.8 Informal Digital Writing and Formal Academic Writing Are on a Continuum

Closer to the truth is that writing across the continuum has some shared purposes and patterns, and some different patterns. With exploration and practice, writers can learn to consciously notice different writing patterns across the continuum. For our final additions to the continuum, we will look at seven brief examples in Table 8.2. Two come from social media, two are from online news sources, two are from marketing emails, and one is from an academic research article. Each one reached wide audiences, as you'll see in the details below.

The examples land on different parts of the continuum. The social media posts on the same platform alone vary, with the [Twitter.com](#) (now [X.com](#)) company post more informal and interpersonal than the post by US President Joe Biden. The marketing emails use patterns around the middle of the continuum: punctuation to convey an excited stance, an emoticon to transition to a new topic. The academic writing example is the most informational, impersonal, and formal. It includes dense noun phrases that prioritize research, along with punctuation to break up compressed sentences. Every one of the seven examples is grammatically possible and meaningful in English, and all seven examples also follow distinct norms based on their locations on the continuum.

Table 8.2 Continuum of informal digital to formal academic writing

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

Informal Digital to Formal Academic Continuum Patterns

Informal Formal
Interpersonal ← Informational
Personal Impersonal

Ex 1: Biden post: “It’s a new day in America.”

Ex 2: Twitter (now X) post: “hello literally everyone”

Ex 3: Irishtimes secondary title: “Well duh.”

Ex 3: Irishtimes opening sentence

Ex 4: *NY Times*: “...the blah...”

Ex 4: *NY Times* secondary title

Ex 5: Suvie email: “We’re super excited...!”

Ex 6: Deliveroo email: “This January, we’ve got...”

Ex 7: The Lancet article:
“Coronaviruses are
enveloped non-segmented...”

Of course, any seven examples are only a limited sampling. In this case, they capture published rather than private examples, and several are dominated by US events and culture. Even so, they show some of the rich diversity of writing that characterizes contemporary life. And even their brief exploration below makes it clear that *correct writing* is neither isolated nor singularly correct.

8.4.8.1 Social Media Writing: Examples 1 and 2

Example 1: It’s a new day in America.

Example 1, by US President Joe Biden, was the most liked Twitter (now X) post of 2021, with more than 4 million likes. The post includes writing patterns between the most formal and informal ends of the continuum. Toward the formal, impersonal side, the example follows *correct*

writing conventions and usage preferences: It includes a full independent clause and norms for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation dating back to myth 1. Toward the informal, interpersonal side, the post includes a contraction (*it's*) and avoids the dense phrases characteristic of formal and informational writing. The post follows English norms of subject-verb-object sentence construction, as well as social media norms of brief length.

Example 2: hello literally everyone

Example 2, posted by Twitter (now X), was the second most-liked post of 2021, with more than 3.3 million likes.

This post follows informal digital writing norms by avoiding capitalization and punctuation. It uses *literally* to add humor and emphasis (rather than to mean “by the letter”), by drawing attention to the global outage on the social media site Facebook that drove even more users to the site. This use of *literally* is not new but is usually informal. These choices prioritize informal, interpersonal connection and follow social media norms for brevity and conventions.⁹

8.4.8.2 Online News Articles: Examples 3 and 4

Example 3: “Harry and Meghan: The Union of Two Great Houses, the Windsors and the Celebrities, Is Complete.”¹⁰

Example 3 is the most-read story in 2021 on [irishtimes.com](https://www.irishtimes.com) (surpassing even the COVID-19 vaccine tracker), by Patrick Freyne. This article, which analyzes the Royals’ 2021 interview with Oprah, moves fluidly around the middle of the writing continuum. It blends informal and formal, interpersonal and informational, and personal and impersonal language patterns.

For instance, the article’s secondary title starts with formal written patterns, and ends with informal ones: “After Harry and Meghan, the monarchy looks archaic and racist. Well duh.” Then, the opening sentence uses formal syntax and mechanics, with some informal wording: “Having a monarchy next door is a little like having a neighbour who’s really into clowns and has daubed their house with clown murals, displays clown dolls in each window and has an insatiable desire to hear about and discuss clown-related news stories.”

In its compressed noun phrases, this sentence uses formal, informational patterns along with informal phrasing (e.g., “really into”). The article continues this blend throughout, using mostly *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences while also using informal phrasing, all of

which is grammatically possible and meaningful in English. The patterns work together to make the writing both informational and interpersonal. For example, the author uses the informal phrase “hysterical batshit-tery,” which is innovative but understandable because it follows morphological processes we use to create nouns in English: compounding two nouns (*bat* + *shit*), then adding the noun suffix *-ery* (think *bakery*), to convey, in this case, a set of inexplicable behaviors.

Example 4: “There’s a Name for the Blah You’re Feeling: It’s Called Languishing.”¹¹

Example 4 is the most-read article of 2021 in *The New York Times*, by Adam Grant. This *New York Times* title uses some informal wording while following formal syntax and conventions, as well as English morphological norms. Like “well duh” in example 3, the use of “blah” approximates speech. At the same time, the writer uses subject-verb-object construction and the determiner *the* to help readers understand that “the blah” refers to a state of being and functions grammatically as a noun.

The secondary title of example 4 is somewhere between interpersonal and informational writing, but it is more formal: “The neglected middle child of mental health can dull your motivation and focus – and it may be the dominant emotion of 2021.” This sentence follows *correct writing* usage preferences and favors noun phrases over verbs; it also hedges with the use of *may* to avoid a generalization. Simultaneously, the passage connects directly with the reader with the use of *your*.

8.4.8.3 Marketing Emails: Examples 5 and 6

Example 5: “We’re super excited to let you know that your new Suvie 2.0 has shipped!”

Examples 5 and 6 are online exemplars for marketing emails.¹² Example 5, by Suvie, is a personalized shipping confirmation email that addresses the recipient by name and opens with a blend of informal and formal patterns: “We’re super excited to let you know that your new Suvie 2.0 has shipped!”. The sentence follows *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences, and it also uses second person address and a balance of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adverbs to emphasize personalized reaction, interpersonal connection, and interpersonal focus.

In and after this opening sentence, the email continues its blend of informal, interpersonal, and formal patterns, including formal capitalization and informal, interpersonal punctuation, emojis, and boosters.

Example 6: This January, we've got more plant-powered deliciousness than you can shake a celery stick at.

Another featured email campaign is from Deliveroo, from their 2021 Veganuary email campaign (here again, we get innovative language following old morphological processes, with the blending of *vegan* + *January* to make *Veganuary*).

The Deliveroo email follows *correct writing* conventions and usage preferences, with full clauses and *correct writing* punctuation and spelling. It also includes informal, interpersonal patterns like second-person address and contractions, as well as more examples of innovative words that follow established morphological processes of English: *Deliciousness* turns *delicious* into a noun with the suffix *-ness* (like *closeness*). Like example 5, the email follows subject-verb-object construction throughout its sentences.

8.4.8.4 Academic Research Article: Example 7

Finally, the most cited academic paper in 2021 was “Clinical Features of Patients Infected with 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China” in *The Lancet*.¹³

The article opens with the following noun-heavy sentence: “Coronaviruses are enveloped non-segmented positive-sense RNA viruses belonging to the family Coronaviridae and the order Nidovirales and broadly distributed in humans and other mammals.[1]”

This opening sentence contains a noun subject (*Coronaviruses*) and a single, simple verb (*are*). The remaining 22 words of the sentence appear in two dense noun phrases coordinated by *and*. These noun phrases emphasize research phenomena and are followed by a citation. In other words, this sentence follows formal, impersonal, informational language patterns characteristic of the far right side of the continuum. The article continues in the same way, with additional patterns such as passive verbs (e.g., *patients were admitted*) and text-internal use of first-person pronouns (e.g., *we collected and analyzed*).

Closer to the truth is that most contemporary adults need to read and write across the writing continuum. Informal digital writing is widespread, practiced by diverse language users following what is grammatically possible and meaningful in English, and characterized by informal, interpersonal, personal language patterns. Formal academic writing is prioritized in universities, practiced by some language users following what is grammatically possible and meaningful in English, and characterized by formal, informational, impersonal language

patterns. Contemporary writing spans the full continuum, and the full continuum is connected, but schools and tests rarely focus on exploring patterns across it.

Related questions get us closer to the truth. What if diverse writing was explored in school, according to a range of purposes and patterns? What if it was equally important for students to recognize how to represent their biology experiment in a tweet as in a lab report? What if students could use their ability to tell what is grammatically possible and meaningful in a social media post to help them recognize what is grammatically possible and meaningful in a school paper? What if students had ongoing chances to recognize and describe language differences, without a hierarchy suggesting only one kind of writing is *correct* and *intelligent*? This approach would take advantage of, rather than miss, a wide range of writing already used.

To support that kind of language knowledge and exploration, we need to recognize old myths and metaphors but conceive of writing anew. That's what we'll do in the concluding chapter.