Myth 2 You Can't Write That in School

Or, Schools Must Regulate Writing

2.1 Pick a Century

More passages from the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries appear below. Can you put them in order?

1. We must help students master standard English.
2. We desire … more attention to English composition and orthography [for students'] command of pure grammatical English.
3. The gentlemen of this nation … are left utterly untaught … they are not able to write or spell true English.
4. What we need to restore is the teaching of correct English as the essential craft through which all writing, whether creative or not, must be expressed.

The words "gentlemen" and "restore" might give away the last two examples. Otherwise, we get different centuries, but the same message: Schools need to regulate *correct writing*, for the sake of students and the nation.

The actual chronological order of the passages is: 3, 2, 1, 4. Passage 3 is the oldest, first appearing in Daniel Defoe's *The Compleat English Gentleman* in 1729. Passage 2 appeared in 1864, in a UK education report with the longest title ever: *Clarendon Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Revenues and Management of Certain Colleges and Schools, and the Studies Pursued and Instruction Given Therein.* Passage 1 appeared in the British newspaper *The Observer* in 1982, and the final passage appeared in the US *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2018.

This myth brings myth 1 to schools and universities. Yet while there was a time when myth 1 didn't exist – a time when there wasn't such a limited version of *correct writing* – there was never a time when English writing in school meant something other than *correct writing*. By the time English writing was taught and tested, what counted as *correct* was already limited.

Still, there was a time when English writing was not the focus of education. That is where our second origin story begins, as English shifted to schools, and schools shifted to English.

2.2 Context for the Myth

2.2.1 English Shifts to Schools, and Schools Shift to English

Before the eighteenth century, a primary site for cultivating English literacy was at home, through family instruction and reading. School, on the other hand, was a site for studying classical languages, at least for the children able to go to school. *Grammar schools*, so named, focused on Latin and Greek grammar, not English grammar.

The slow shift toward English study began in the eighteenth century in UK and US universities. Inspired by the practical and nationalist ideals of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution, groups of Scots, Brits, and Americans began reforming education and promoting English-language study. Scottish universities were studying English in the 1730s; in England, dissenting academies had broken from the Oxford and Cambridge tradition and were providing secular English study by the mid-eighteenth century. Defoe, whose passage about *true English* opens this chapter, was one such dissenting academy student.[1]

The US shift to English was promoted by Princeton's Scottish president John Witherspoon, and many Americans considered it a welcome change. Puritans were suspicious of classical pagan writers and their threat to Christian scripture, and Quakers preferred practical curricular subjects. Prominent eighteenth-century thinkers promoted English as well: Thomas Paine, Enlightenment disciple and author of *The Age of Reason*, did not study Latin; Benjamin Franklin advocated English study in schools, with classical languages and even other modern languages for elective study.

Still, revolutionary as it was to call for English at the time, the English called for was not revolutionary. It was *correct writing* only. A usage warden we met in myth 1, clergyman Joseph Priestley, provides a good illustration. Priestley was an eighteenth-century tutor at Warrington Academy known for his radical ideas about education, politics, and religion. Yet his radicalism stopped short of his ideas about English: Priestley implied standardized English was inherently superior, while other varieties were "bad English."

Priestley's instructional materials also provide a good illustration of the early practice of using several languages in educational materials. When it came to English, Priestley tolerated only *correct writing*; at the same time, he did not confine his writing to English alone. His published lectures included examples from English, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.[2] His examples for the "harmony of sentences," for instance, include Cicero's Fourth Oration against Catiline in Latin, then Milton's Treatise on Education in English. Later university materials, such as George Campbell's 1776 *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* and Hugh Blair's 1784 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, included multiple languages b *correct writing* in English, particularly in responses to English literature.

By 1866, Alexander Bain's textbook *English Composition and Rhetoric* used examples from Campbell's *Philosophy* but aimed to "methodize instruction in English Composition," and did not include regular references to Latin. The textbook's particular goal was to foster "the discrimination between good and bad in expression," by correcting written English.

For Bain, there was "no better method" than to amend "imperfectly worded" writing according to "the laws and the proprieties of style." Readers were tasked, for instance, with correcting figures of speech in these sentences:

- Many a youth launches forth on the journey of life with no fixed goal in view.
- Followers and friends, around the dying hero's couch, hold their breath, while the last spark of life is ebbing and the soul is preparing to take its heavenward flight.

These examples are all grammatically possible and meaningful in English. But they were not *correct* enough according to Bain, and it was the job of schools and students to correct them.

College entrance examinations showed similar changes by the end of the nineteenth century. The University of London regular entrance examinations in the 1830s and 1840s included Greek and Latin translation and did not include English composition, but by the 1870s and 1880s, they included timed English composition essays, often focused on literary texts in English.

Similarly, the first Harvard English exams in 1874 had students write timed essays "correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression," focused on "Shakespeare's Tempest, Julius Caesar, and Merchant of Venice; Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield; Scott's Ivanhoe and Lay of the Last Minstrel," and the Cambridge 1883 English exam asked students

to write about dates and grammar in Shakespeare's writing. The 1883 Cambridge examiners were ultimately disappointed in student responses: "The grammatical peculiarities of Shakespeare's time were described by many candidates as 'bad grammar' without any explanation," the examiners complained. The students, it seems, were regulating language without language knowledge, thereby showing the combined success of myths 1 and 2.

Just like universities, primary and secondary schools were increasingly testing and teaching *correct writing* in English in the nineteenth century. Industrial revolutions in the UK and US brought rural families without written literacy to cities, and school legislation responded by expanding and focusing on English: The UK school curriculum was essentially defined by classical languages until the Grammar Schools Act of 1840, but by the 1850s, educational reports suggested speaking Latin was optional. By the 1861 Newcastle Report on popular education, English was a major focus. A school commissioner insisted:

[W]hat is commonly understood as an English education takes too low a place. I say this the more confidently as I find that scarcely a boy in the whole institution, in his written answers to my questions, more especially in the lectures which afford the greatest scope for it, has exhibited much power of English composition, and most have shown no power or facility at all.

In response, the report outlined compensation for teachers in order to promote "the study of the subjects proper to elementary [education]": History, English Literature, Geography, Physical Science, and Applied Mathematics. The 1864 Clarendon Report from the opening of the chapter likewise named Latin and Greek not as independent subjects, but as instruments for helping students learn "pure grammatical English."

Already supported by myth 1, this myth fueled the idea that *correct writing* in English was moral training needed for all of the nation's children. More and more people received this message through schools, because education levels were rising: While in 1870 adults averaged three to five years of education, by 1910 the same groups averaged closer to six to seven and a half years. In the process, educational institutions became dominant spaces for cultivating and defining English literacy.

2.2.2 Language Policies Privilege English and English Literature

In these developments, English became the language of schools, after already being a language of law and commerce. Other native UK languages did not receive the same emphasis. Welsh and Gaelic use declined in part because opportunity was increasingly yoked to English,

and in part because of explicit, narrow language policies.[3] In Scotland, the Napier Commission of 1883 made English literacy the core of the curriculum, even as Gaelic was sometimes used in classrooms. In Ireland, the British government's 1831 National System of Education only made provisions for English, and textbooks from the National Board were written in English and promoted English literature. In Wales, government reports disparaged the Welsh language. As the nineteenth century continued, official UK documents conflated the English language with progress.

In the US, the nineteenth century was mixed: There were no explicit English-only policies (yet), but English was used to subjugate and discriminate. Prominent examples included Native American schools and literacy requirements for non-European immigrants. Native American children were sent away from their homes and families to English-only boarding schools with the goal of forcefully assimilating them to English and Anglo settler cultural traditions. And in just one example of policies affecting non-European immigrants, the children of Chinese and Japanese immigrants were ineligible for citizenship and often kept out of mainstream education.

At the same time, certain nineteenth-century immigrants joined a US society where linguistic diversity was viable and reflected in policy. Schools in multiple states provided instruction in English as well as the languages of other local immigrant families. German communities and language programs, for instance, were so prevalent that knowledge of German was deemed "essential to a finished education" by the US Commissioner of Education in 1870. For a time, selective policies like this emphasized multiple languages. At the same time, English was already the language of US law and commerce, and *correct English* was the English of schools.
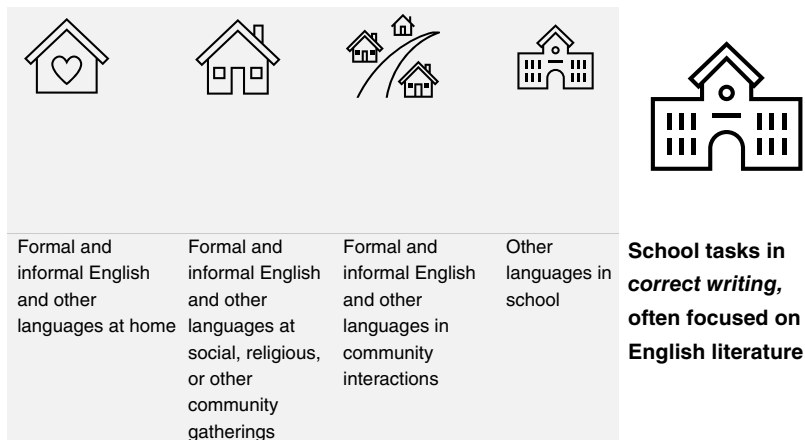
2.3 The Myth Emerges

By the end of the nineteenth century, this myth had emerged, ensuring schools regulated one kind of English. *Correct writing* began its reign in schools, at the expense of other language use.

2.4 Consequences of the Myth

2.4.1 We Limit *Writing in School*

In this myth, *correct writing* in English starts to count more than other languages in school, and more than literacy outside of school. Schools, in turn, become places for hunting down errors in students' written English.

Formal and informal English and other languages at home	Formal and informal English and other languages at social, religious, or other community gatherings	Formal and informal English and other languages in community interactions	Other languages in school	**School tasks in *correct writing,* often focused on English literature**

Figure 2.1 Continuum of language contexts

Figure 2.1 depicts a continuum of language contexts, from language use at home to restricted language at school.

The 1883 book *Speech and Manners for Home and School* modelled what said error hunting should be like: extensive, and no fun whatever. In a chapter called "Correcting Composition," Miss Blank (perhaps not the most inspiring name for a teacher) has the following exchange.

STUDENT: I wish you'd read us some nice compositions, Miss Blank, and not just all the mistakes.

TEACHER: So I would if you had come together for an hour's amusement, Nina, but if you want to improve your style and learn to write correctly, the only way is to have your faults pointed out, and if we do that there is no time for anything else.

After Miss Blank clarifies that learning *correct writing* should not be amusing, she further specifies that it should not explore students' natural English knowledge. As she points out errors, the student Penelope Piper offers a revision according to what she calls "good grammar." In Socratic fashion, Miss Blank presses Penelope.

TEACHER: Isn't all grammar good, Pen?

STUDENT: Good English, I suppose I ought to say, but it will never seem natural.

TEACHER: It will seem natural if you say it often enough.

Such is Miss Blank's approach: Error-hunting, unnatural and unamusing as it is, defines writing. This leaves "no time for anything else."

The overall consequence of this myth is that we limit writing in school. Between this myth and the last, we narrow both the part of the writing

Table 2.1 Consequences of myth 2

Once we believe	… English regulation becomes "manifestly desirable"
Schools must regulate writing, then…	… Writing in school means hunting for errors rather than exploring patterns
	... *Correct writing* is a bond while other language use is a threat
	… Language difference comes at a double cost
	… We have limited options amid mass migration
	… We miss opportunities for language knowledge

continuum, and the contexts, that define *correct writing*. We can see the contexts left behind in Figure 2.1.

Narrowing writing in school comes with several more specific consequences.

2.4.2 English Regulation Becomes "Manifestly Desirable"

This myth takes for granted that one form of writing – not diverse language use – is best for students. In the eighteenth century, Priestley championed English as a more egalitarian language, but he did not champion egalitarian usage of English. More than a century later, the Harvard examiner Byron Satterlee Hurlbut described the requirement of *correct writing* as "simple," suggesting that "no demand could be more reasonable, more legitimate."

A similar tone appeared in the 1921 Newbolt Report commissioned by the UK Board of Education. The report argued that *correct English* – the "language spoken at the Court, and in Oxford and Cambridge" – was not better than other language use. But it was "manifestly desirable" that all English people learn it, because it was necessary for people "to be fully intelligible to each other" and because not using it was "a serious handicap in many ways." This restriction was not avoided by everyone learning about multiple kinds of English, but by everyone learning and regulating *correct writing*. Table 2.1 identifies the shortfall of a constrained view.

In turn, regulating *correct writing* is necessary, because *correct writing* is associated with success and mutual understanding. Language regulation mode is therefore neutral, as though it doesn't interfere with students' other language use or identities, or it is necessary, even if it does. Error hunting becomes a key part of what people believe schools do, and beliefs about *correct writing* overshadow experiences in which varied writing is useful. These beliefs inform the predominant culture of schooling in English, and they make it very hard to change institutions.

Likewise, regulating *correct writing* is manifestly desirable because it upholds high standards, whether or not students agree. The passage at the start of this chapter from *The Observer* illustrates this presumption. Titled "The Decline and Fall of English Grammar," the article was by John Rae, headmaster of the prestigious Westminster School, who argued *correct writing* is best for students, especially those who were not "middle-class children from literate homes." The way to regulate "decline" in *correct writing*, Rae argued is to use a thirty-year-old usage guide, which would "restore correct English and clear thinking to the curriculum." In this solution, Rae brings us right back to myth 1, and no matter how narrow his ideas were, he was in the position to enforce them.

Why privilege one kind of English rather than facility with diverse language use? This myth not only means that we don't have a good answer to this question, other than the self-fulfilling desirability of *correct writing*. It also means that the question is unlikely to be asked, because the job of schools is to regulate *correct writing* in English.

2.4.3 Writing in School Means Hunting for Errors rather than Exploring Patterns

A consequence of this myth is that teachers and students have abundant incentive to hunt for errors in *correct writing*. They do not have incentive to explore what is grammatically possible and meaningful in a full writing continuum.

This consequence persists even as specific usage conventions change. For example, until recently, English usage guides said "split infinitives" were errors: Writers were told ***to write** definitely this way*, rather than ***to** definitely **write** this way*. This advice was based on what is grammatically possible in Latin (recall the Latin-loving gatekeepers we met in myth 1), rather than what is possible in English.

Today, this usage prescription has changed. Split infinitives are not usually considered errors. Still, because they learn in language regulation mode, students are more likely to learn they can or cannot split infinitives than to explore how writers use infinitive verbs.

Few native-speaking writers of English receive explicit opportunities to explore language patterns across the writing continuum in school, and so even writers with a lot of formal writing practice often have subconscious, rather than conscious, writing knowledge. They have learned to hunt for errors, rather than to explore what is variously possible and meaningful in English.

2.4.4 *Correct Writing* Is a Bond while Other Language Is a Threat

We saw earlier that the Newbolt Report placed *correct writing* in opposition to all other usage. All non-standardized usage was mislabeled as *dialect* (even though standardized English is also a dialect), and non-standardized usage was only permitted outside of schools and workplaces: "Side by side with standard English," the report described, "dialect will probably persist and be used in the playground and the street." Narrow as that is, the report did not stop there: "In many cases, indeed, it will deserve to persist, on account of its historic interest." Here, the report commissioners (and through them, schools) decide which kinds of language "deserve to persist" (and even then, as tolerated historic artifact).

The same report framed English as a national bond and answer to class conflict. "A feeling for our own native language would be a bond between classes and would beget the right kind of national pride," the report states. The report praised national literature along the same lines: "even more certainly should pride and joy in the national literature serve as such a bond."

UK and Commonwealth language policy after the Newbolt Report showed a similarly paternalistic bent, primarily supporting English monolingualism modelled on southern British usage preferences. In Australia, legislation between 1937 and 1973 justified neglect of Australian Indigenous languages and other non-English language teaching in the name of "protecting" and "advancing people's welfare." Bilingual Indigenous-English education policies improved after the 1970s, but still often treated language diversity as something to be contained rather than prioritized.

More recent UK and Commonwealth policies include counterexamples, particularly since the 1990s. Contemporary Australian language policies have been described as progressive and pluralistic, and they have added an incentive for students to study non-English languages. In New Zealand, late twentieth-century reforms implemented Māori-medium education, though advocates argue that more needs to be done. In Canada, attention to Indigenous languages, in addition to Canada's two official languages of English and French, has recently grown. Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England all require foreign language study alongside English in primary school, and Wales includes a bilingual English/Welsh education curriculum.[4] In educational requirements such as Scotland's "Mother tongue plus 2," language diversity is framed as an asset. Sometimes, these provisions appear in one country but not another, leaving uncertainty, on one hand, but local flexibility, on the other.

In the US, language policies have prioritized English and *correct writing* since World War I, when the country began crafting a national

identity that equated English with patriotism. In 1917, the pointedly named Trading with the Enemy Act declared non-English printed matter unmailable without a certified English translation. In 1918, Iowa Governor William Harding banned the use of any foreign language in public – in church, in schools, and on the telephone, still public at the time. Theodore Roosevelt, then the US president, endorsed the ban a few days later in a speech, insisting "There can be but one loyalty – to the Stars and Stripes; one nationality – the American – and therefore only one language – the English language." Five years later, the Supreme Court prohibited foreign-language bans in *Meyer* v. *Nebraska*, but by then, non-English programs, including many in German, French, and Spanish, had been dropped from school curricula.

In the late twentieth century, the idea that US unity depended on English monolingualism appeared in public media, proposed legislation, and the English-Only movement. In 1977, the president of Boston University, John Silber, linked bilingual voting ballots with declining standards and equated English with US stability – unlike "Canada, Belgium, and other nations with explosive linguistic problems." In another narrow equation, Silber linked *correct writing* with communication, insisting all students should learn to write with "middle-class proficiency" to be able to "communicate fully." He made no mention of the alternative, that teachers could learn their students' diverse dialects to be able to communicate fully.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the US English-Only movement equated English monolingualism with national unity and upward mobility. In Congress, a 1981 constitutional amendment attempted to make English the official language of the US and, in schools, to restrict other languages to instruction toward English proficiency only. In the mid-1980s, the English Language Amendment (ELA) argued that "unquestioned acceptance of [English] by immigrants" ensured US unity, to the "envy" of other, "fractured" societies. These federal amendments did not pass, but state-level policies like them did. In the process, the English-Only movement implied that English use was the primary measure of a successful education, echoing the manifest desirability of English in earlier educational policies.

English-Only efforts continue in the US in the twenty-first century, as do countereffforts. Support for bilingual education has grown somewhat over the past decade, and immersive Indigenous language and cultural education have shown consistently positive results. Simultaneously, many US schools continue to frame language difference as a threat. In 2007, attempting to ban the use of languages other than English on school buses, a superintendent evoked the same paternalistic reasoning we saw in the 1921 Newbolt Report: "[It may be] more comfortable for many

to speak their native language … but what is always more comfortable is not always what is in their best interest." The bus ban was eventually overturned, but today, more than thirty US states have passed policies that emphasize English as a source of unity and assimilation.[5]

In short, while language policies can support language exploration and knowledge, many have instead upheld the first two myths. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) educators have put it this way: Most language policies prioritize one language and culture, regardless of how that impacts student learning, even as learning is meant to be the primary job of schools.

2.4.5 Language Difference Comes at a Double Cost

Because schools reward and regulate it, those who practice and identify with *correct writing* are rewarded in school. Those who practice and value other writing face a double cost. Their usage is not rewarded in school, and their use of other parts of the writing continuum can have a confessional effect, betraying an identity or origin whether they like it or not. In this way, different language users face different costs. Each speaker or writer, observed author James Baldwin, "has paid, and is paying, a different price" for what is considered *correct*.

Meanwhile, the judgments of the writing gatekeepers are widely accepted, viewed as manifestly desirable and appropriate. The result, in the words of linguist Rosina Lippi-Green, is that language discrimination remains "the last widely open backdoor to discrimination." Students can go to school and university with practice in multiple parts of the writing continuum. But if they don't practice the *correct writing* at the right time, their language use will not be recognized or rewarded in school.

2.4.6 We Have Limited Options amid Mass Migration

Language directly impacts access and opportunity for migrants, and we live in a time of mass migration. Global estimates suggest there were 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, and those estimates preceded important migration events such as the war in Ukraine, beginning in 2022.

Language regulation mode, which rewards English and specifically *correct* English, means some migrants will have more opportunity and aid than others in English-medium nations. But mass migration necessitates an approach like English as a lingua franca – an approach that seeks practical, positive points of understanding amid inevitable language diversity, rather than only one kind of English.

Here's an example cautionary tale, of mass migration and artificial intelligence (AI). Immigration language AI varies – some, such as Finland's Kamu and the US Mona, provide immigration and legal advice in real time to immigrants and refugees. In several cases, these technologies can save time and facilitate rapid access to aid. However, in cases of *correct writing* regulation, AI can go wrong, particularly in high-stakes educational situations without human verification. In one example from 2016, the UK Home Office erroneously deported 7,000 international students for cheating on English language tests needed to secure UK visas. The Home Office AI had mistakenly perceived cheating in 20 percent of the cases.

2.4.7 We Miss Opportunities for Language Knowledge

Many well-intentioned parents and educators regulate *correct writing* in the name of access. This is understandable, given the pervasiveness of language regulation mode. But a fixation on a highly limited mold of English can overshadow learning and mean missed opportunities for supporting diverse language knowledge and experiences.

For instance, it is common to see regulation of *correct writing* no matter what students are doing. They could be describing a historical event or chemical process unrelated to *correct writing*, for example, but their usage is regulated along with their chemistry or history information. This can make students feel less safe and more self-conscious, so that they use cognitive bandwidth to focus on *correct writing*, rather than on the intended focus of their learning.

In another example, people and policies often use deficit descriptions to refer to any language use that is not *correct writing*. Deficit terms focus on what English users do not know rather than what they do know, and they imply intellectual inferiority, such as by describing non-standardized usage as *broken* or *lazy*. This demeans most of the writing continuum, along with its many writers, identities, and values. Geneva Smitherman, the linguistics professor we met in the introduction, puts it this way: "See, when you lambast the home language that kids bring to school, you ain just dissen dem, you talking about they mommas!"

With all of this is missed opportunity: People miss out on all kinds of language knowledge outside of *correct writing* errors. Students learn deficit ideas and *not* additive ideas – ideas that affirm existing language values and practices that people already rely on every day. Students, and their teachers, miss opportunities for connecting with others and for understanding different kinds of language patterns.

2.5 Closer to the Truth

2.5.1 Language Diversity and Language Knowledge Are Human Rights

This myth makes it possible for schools to regulate social and geopolitical concerns through regulating language. Some policies prioritize English at the expense of other languages, and many evoke English, and literature in English, as essential national tools. Most policies to date use the terms English or writing when they mean *correct English* or *correct writing*. All policies we've seen reinforce schools as the site for literacy development and nation-building, but the worst of the lot appear in the US, where many policies, past and present, equate monolingualism with national unity despite the documented social, cognitive, and economic advantages of multilingualism.

As we saw in the last chapter, closer to the truth is that writing across the continuum is linguistically equal, and schools and homes and streets are full of writing that is possible and meaningful in English. Also closer to the truth is that language policies can support this diversity, by framing language variety as a valuable part of national and individual literacy and identity.

Such is the spirit of the 1996 Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which showed international consensus on principles for language rights. Articles 9 and 10 note that "All language communities have the right to codify, standardize, preserve, develop and promote their linguistic system, without induced or forced interference," and state that "All language communities have equal rights." In other words, language diversity is a human right, including diversity of registers and dialects within a language.

Other Declaration articles concern language learning. Articles 27 and 29 note that "All language communities are entitled to an education which will enable their members to acquire knowledge of any languages related to their own cultural tradition" and "This right does not exclude the right to acquire oral and written knowledge of any language which may be of use to him/her as an instrument of communication with other language communities." In other words, language knowledge – of diverse language use, including diverse registers and dialects – is also a human right.

2.5.2 Language Diversity Persists but Isn't Studied in Schools

Even as language regulation prioritizes only a small part of the writing continuum, language difference offers knowledge and community across the continuum, with new chances to learn and relate based on authentic, up-to-date language use. Traditions like English as a lingua franca (ELF) already illustrate the productive use of pluralized English that accommodates diverse speakers' needs, norms, and values. In universities specifically, a

small number of international institutions follow ELFA norms (English as an academic lingua franca), based on English used by millions of educators and students in hybrid and innovative forms considered *incorrect* according to this myth. In education that does not currently take an ELF approach, including most native English education, we can do more to resist this myth and see the full writing continuum as part of language knowledge.
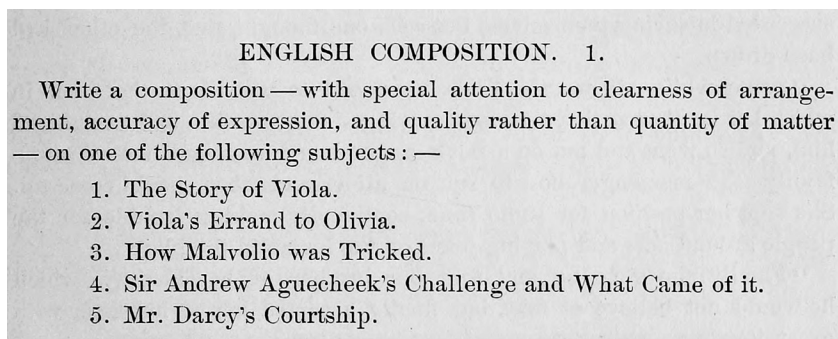
2.5.3 School Writing Is on a Narrow Continuum

To add to the writing continuum in this chapter, we'll look at two student essays. These essays and their examiner commentary illustrate what characterized *correct writing* as universities began to regulate students' English.

The essays were written in response to a task on the 1887 Harvard English entrance exam, which appear below in Figure 2.2. The task emphasizes literature and *correct writing*, according to "correct spelling, punctuation, arrangement, and accuracy of expression."

The Harvard examiner for that year, L. B. R. Briggs, included the two essays in his report. Briggs had nothing positive to say about the first essay that appears below, but he used the second as an illustration of an average, passing (if disapointing) theme. Below, I've placed both essays on the continuum and described them in terms of (1) the five shared purposes of cohesion, connection, focus, stance, and usage, and (2) informal to formal, interpersonal to informational, and personal to impersonal writing patterns. In this case, the essay that especially disappointed the reviewer is the more informal, interpersonal, and personal one. Still, because we are looking at student writing after the start of myths 1 and 2, we are only looking at a small part of the wider continuum.

First, Table 2.2 shows continuum patterns throughout the students' sentences and paragraphs. Then, the full essays appear, with marginal notes

ENGLISH COMPOSITION. 1.

Write a composition — with special attention to clearness of arrangement, accuracy of expression, and quality rather than quantity of matter — on one of the following subjects : —

    1. The Story of Viola.
    2. Viola's Errand to Olivia.
    3. How Malvolio was Tricked.
    4. Sir Andrew Aguecheek's Challenge and What Came of it.
    5. Mr. Darcy's Courtship.

Figure 2.2 1887 Harvard English entrance exam task

Table 2.2 1887 Harvard student exam writing continuum

Texting Social Email   Secondary   College   Published

1887 Harvard Student Exam Writing Patterns

	Informal / Interpersonal / Personal	Formal / Informational / Impersonal
Continuum Purposes	Informal Interpersonal Personal	Formal Informational Impersonal
Cohesion	• **Hourglass organization:** Text moves from very general questions (*inconsistency*) to details about the novel (*Darcy's courtship*), back to general concepts (*pride*, *love*)	• **Pyramid organization:** Text moves from specific book examples following the book's plot, to general concepts (*frankness*, *independence*)
Connection	• **Interpersonal connection** Rhetorical questions, 2nd person pronouns 1st person is text-external	• **Informational connection** No direct address, rare 1st person references unfolding argument (*I think*)
Focus	• **Personal and interpersonal subjects** Mostly simple sentence subjects (*you, Darcy, he, love*) emphasize feelings and personal reactions Some passive verbs	• **Informational subjects** Sentence subjects are dense noun phrases about characters and abstract concepts Some passive verbs
Stance	• **Certain stance** Regular boosters and generalizations (*really, mere, merely, anyone, anything, every, surely*)	• **More neutral stance** No regular boosters or hedges No generalizations
Usage	• *Correct writing* **conventions and usage preferences**	• *Correct writing* **conventions and usage preferences**
Opening sentences	What a strange paradox of character Darcy at first seems ? You hardly can account for it. It may seem unnatural when first you think of it. But think. …	Mr. Darcy, a young man of distinguished birth and great wealth, with that peculiar pride in his character which young men of wealth generally acquire from the adulation paid to them by ignorant people, is surprised at and delighted with the independence and frankness of spirit with which a certain Miss Bennett receives him. This Miss Bennett he first saw at an evening party given by the sisters of a friend of his. …
Examiner comments	Vicious morality and fatal facility blight every line... None but a cynic can fail to sympathize with the writer of this theme for the agony that awaits him in Harvard College, the lashing that he must endure before he finds his true place in that hardhearted little world. If there is one thing that Harvard College will not tolerate, it is "gush," – "gush" in general, and moral or oratorical "gush" in particular.	A theme of average mark clearly above the passing line. … The boy does not dream that the story is full of life; to him it is something to go through – like statistics. Accordingly he tabulates it, and appends a moral duller than his tables.

and annotations showing examples of cohesion, connection, focus, and stance in the writing, with some sentence subjects underlined, transitional words **in bold**, connection markers [in brackets], *hedges* in italics, ***boosters*** and ***generalizations*** italicized and bolded, and passive verbs [[in double brackets]].

2.5.3.1 Poorly Rated 1887 Harvard Essay

What a strange paradox of character <u>Darcy</u> at first seems? [You] *hardly can* account for it. <u>It</u> *may seem* unnatural when first you think of it. But think. Know [you] not many of [your friends] whose actions *seem to be* inconsistent. Aye, look [you] at your own. [Think how often you astonish yourself, as well as those who know you, by your various actions and then look at Darcy.]

> **Hourglass organization and interpersonal opening:**
> In this paragraph, the writer addresses the reader directly several times. The writer does so to introduce the topic of Darcy's character, and to propose that even the reader's own character may be inconsistent

Pride and Prejudice — Darcy's character ***alone*** would have given the first part of the title of the book. But what is pride? Does it not ***continually*** display itself? Does it not *consist* (emphasis original) itself in display. How noticeable then when it occurs. ***Surely*** pride in itself is no tremendous fault, but its disagreeableness lies in this ***very*** characteristic — display.

> **A certain stance:**
> Several boosters convey a sense of certainty in this paragraph

But you wonder how this has ***anything*** to do with his courtship. Aye, in ***every*** way. [Do you not remember his pride, the very first time you saw him there in the ballroom? how he was above dancing? Do you not remember seeing Bingley go up to him to beg of him to dance? And can you not remember his reply, remarking that Elizabeth was only tolerable?] **But** that same Elizabeth in a few years is mistress of Pemberley. Mark how he ***only*** watches the second Miss Bennet, but he is too proud to court openly. **Also**, by way of remark, I

> **An interpersonal and certain stance:**
> In this paragraph, the writer moves to connect the theme of inconsistency with the exam topic of courtship, and again addresses the reader directly throughout the paragraph. The

think I remember hearing him speak to Bingley about the Bennets' vulgar relatives. ***Even*** his love breaks not through his pride; his Pride and Love go hand in hand, if Pride does not lead the way. **But** his love is safe, for that love's bitterest enemy, pride, [[is overthrown]] by Elizabeth's disdainful rejection. [Could you not almost foresee this?] Would ***any one*** have been a wonderful prophet to have told that he was in love with Elizabeth, nay ***even*** that he would propose, (and why should he not for he, through his pride, was confident of acceptance?) that Elizabeth would scornfully refuse, and that his pride would [[be broken]]? What could more ***surely*** break one's pride than have a proposal, in assurance given, cast back in one's face, as Darcy's was?

There was something that made me love Darcy from the beginning. It shone through his pride, through his arrogance, and made me feel that, behind that unpleasant outside, there was a *true man*. I know not what it was, but it made me feel that I wished I had that man's character without his pride.

With Elizabeth's refusal his true courtship ***really*** begins. Before, he was courting his own pride; **now**, he courts Miss Elizabeth Bennet. His love, no longer smothered under the wet blanket of his pride burns unhindered; and to have Darcy's unhindered love was to have a most precious, most priceless thing. It was not a ***mere*** passionate affection, that lived ***merely*** for the pleasure of its existence. It was a love of tender regard, that lived ***solely*** for the being to whom it was directed and because of whom it came into existence.

Can it not be put this way <u>Darcy</u> had pride. <u>Love</u> crept in. That love grew and grew. That love startled his pride. It was too late for the love to be stifled, it ***could only be*** restrained. <u>His pride</u> was broken, and <u>his love</u> unrestrained filled his life. Pride can no more enter that heart of which true Love has full possession."

[Sidebar notes]

paragraph shows knowledge of the text and mainly countering transitions like *but*, along with strong stance markers including *only* and *surely*

Personalized paragraph: This paragraph emphasizes the writer's personal reactions and feelings

A certain stance: Here, the writer expresses a strong stance that after Elizabeth Bennett's refusal, Darcy puts aside his pride

Hourglass organization and interpersonal conclusion: To close, the writer addresses the reader directly and offers generalizations about pride and love

2.5.3.2 Passing 1887 Harvard Entrance Essay

Mr. Darcy, a young man of distinguished birth and great wealth, with that peculiar pride in his character which young men of wealth generally acquire from the adulation paid to them by ignorant people, [is surprised at and delighted with] the independence and frankness of spirit with which a certain Miss Bennett receives him. This Miss Bennett he first saw at an evening party given by the sisters of a friend of his. He afterwards saw her at the home of his friend where, contrasting the sharp, witty conduct of Miss Bennett towards him with the ignorant adulation of his friend's sisters, he falls in love with her.

Hourglass organization and informational opening: In this introduction, the writer uses many dense noun phrases to emphasize information about Darcy and Bennett. The sentences favor nouns and phrases, with very few verbs, including passive construction

Miss Bennett [[is so influenced]] by the insinuations of a renegade ward of Darcy's father that she despises him. When, by chance, they meet at the country house of Darcy's aunt, Darcy proposes and [is rejected] by Miss Bennett who flaunts in his face the wrongs charged to him by his father's ward. Darcy is *so* incensed that he says nothing and leaves. After some consideration, he concludes to explain away these falsehoods and does so to the entire satisfaction of Miss Bennett who now begins to see many noble traits in Darcy and, after a while, falls in love with him.

Impersonal stance: Here the writer offers details from the plot of the novel without using many boosters, hedges, or generalizations.

Darcy, after he has done many favors for Miss Bennett's family, again proposes to Miss Bennett and is ***heartily*** accepted. Darcy, when asked by Miss Bennett why he fell in love with her, admits that it was *principally* on account of her humbling his spirit of pride and teaching him the pleasure of treating one's supposed inferiors well.

Darcy finally marries Miss Bennett to the great chagrin of his friend's sisters (the Bingleys) who make great protestations that the match is pleasing to them.

informational stance: Here, the writer offers information from the novel and a boosted and hedged stance about Darcy's courtship

The moral of ***all*** this, *I think*, is that slavish flattery will ***never*** attract the attention either of those who may deserve our praise or of those who do not to any qualities, either of mind or body, which we ***may*** possess.

General, interpersonal closing: Here, the writer moves to close

> While, **on the other hand**, <u>frankness and independence of spirit</u> will ***always*** obtain [for us], even among the greatest of men due consideration and respect.

> with a boosted and hedged stance about courtship more generally

Both of the essays use grammatically possible and meaningful English. They both answer the exam question, and they are both critiqued by the Harvard examiner. But the more informal, interpersonal, personal essay (appearing first) is evaluated more negatively than the more formal, informational, impersonal essay. The poorly evaluated essay falls further left on the continuum; its language patterns convey something akin to excited, conversational musing about the character of Darcy. The more positively rated essay falls further right on the continuum; its language patterns emphasize information in the text more than the reader's personalized reaction.

These two examples add to our writing continuum details, and they highlight the confounding limits of *correct writing*. In this case, students were told to write about "Mr. Darcy's Courtship" under timed circumstances, using *correct* spelling, punctuation, arrangement, and accuracy of expression. Both essays followed these instructions. Still, they did not both please the examiner, and additional, more particular preferences emerge in the examiner responses. We will see many more such examples in the chapters to come.

Closer to the truth is that to pursue the human rights of diverse language and language knowledge, we need more explicit, transparent exploration of the full continuum of writing. But first: To continue to understand the myths that have kept us from this approach, we turn to myth 3, in which *correct writing*, now regulated by schools, becomes an indicator of *intelligence*.Xime ressequas dolorehent asi officiae ditate con pres et reriorercil et et, aboremporro dolorpo sandit rerciis aut pa