



Prepare for Success in your First-Year College Writing Course!

A GUIDE TO TAKING CONTROL
OF YOUR EDUCATION

GREETINGS, FUTURE COLLEGE STUDENT!

I'm MJ Stafford, a longtime college English professor and writer, teaching college English courses for over two decades now. I well understand how the transition to college can be challenging for people, whether fresh out of high school or returning to education later in life. And like many I counsel, you may be concerned that your writing skills aren't sufficient for college-level work. It's a concern worthy of further consideration and time.

Why? Because too many students find out that they are not equipped for their first semester of college writing and drop or fail—after spending time and money or getting into debt. I witness this *all* the time in the online college classes I teach.

PROF. MJ STAFFORD College English Instructor



I don't want you to be one of these people! Therefore, along with The College Writing Prep Program, I created this free guide to help you prepare for the realities of college-level freshman reading and writing in first-year English and across the curriculum.

So, let's start by addressing and debunking a few myths about writing and college. Then we'll look at some tools and resources to help you start your first college year with more strength and confidence!



MYTH #1

MYTH #1: ALL U.S. PUBLIC ED ADEQUATELY PREPARES STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE

DEBUNKING THE MYTH:

It's a common misconception that simply graduating from high school or earning a GED ensures you are ready for college-level curriculum.

The truth is that not all secondary education in the language arts is equal. Some students confess they never even read a novel or wrote an essay in high school! These students experience a rude awakening in their first-year writing class. Why?

Because college demands a higher level of critical thinking, reading comprehension, and writing. Unless it's a remedial/developmental English class, college instructors assume students already possess a certain level of competency with essay writing, grammar, and analytical thinking.

WHAT YOU CAN DO Strengthen Skills Before College

BRIDGE THE GAP:

Seek out remedial resources. The digital world offers endless resources offering remedial programs, activities, and apps designed to strengthen your reading and writing skills.

Below is the writing prep program mentioned in the introduction that you might check out:

- [The College Writing Prep Program](#)
 - Tailored specifically to better prepare under-prepared students for first-year English course curriculum

www.globalwritingsupport.com



MYTH #2

MYTH #2: PEOPLE ARE EITHER BORN GOOD WRITERS OR NOT

DEBUNKING THE MYTH:

Many people think that good writing should come naturally, but that is far from the truth. Rest assured that those born with the “writing gene” are few and far between.

The truth is that while we each may be born with certain gifts or aptitudes, **all** writers (professional included!) work hard to develop their skills and craft, and **rarely** does any content come out without generating some sweat, dread, and multiple drafts.

With effort, practice, tutors, and revision, **you** also can develop your writing competency—**no matter** your current skill level and **no matter** if you think, “I’m not a good writer.”

Yes, you **can** improve!

WHAT YOU CAN DO Practice Reading & Writing

READ MORE: Strong writers are typically lifelong readers, but it is never too late to start! Explore genres of writing you might enjoy, if you aren’t sure. And why not support your local library and see what catches your interest? Make it fun--and free!

PRACTICE WRITING: Set aside time daily or weekly for writing exercises. Practice different types of writing, such as essays, reports, and creative writing. **Any** kind of writing will be good practice—including journaling!

A great way to start is with finding writing prompts.

Resource: Here is one of many writing prompt sites you can access for free online:

[The Learning Network, NYTimes](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/learning/over-1000-writing-prompts-for-students.html)

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MYTH #3

MYTH #3: NOW WITH AI, STUDENTS DON'T NEED TO DEVELOP READING & WRITING SKILLS

DEBUNKING THE MYTH:

Academic Integrity. Most U.S. colleges penalize the use of AI-generated content as a violation of academic integrity—a form of **plagiarism**. Along with instructors being able to detect bot writing, AI detector software is becoming increasingly sophisticated for identifying such AI use. And rightly so!

Ethics. AI-created writing misrepresents the student's own efforts and skill levels because using AI to write assignments (especially in an English writing course!) undermines the core objective of the course—to develop one's voice, critical thinking abilities, and written communication quality.

Personal Growth. Relying on a tool to do the work bypasses the learning process, depriving students of the opportunity to develop their minds, engage deeply with the material, sharpen critical thinking, and strengthen their command of language and written communication.

Benefits of Doing. Embracing the learning process not only prepares students for their future careers but also enriches their ability to express ideas and engage with the world meaningfully—all crucial for success in any field.

WHAT YOU CAN DO Follow Tips to Not Rely on AI

BUILD GOOD HABITS & CONFIDENCE

- **Set Clear Learning Goals:** Understand that the process of writing is as valuable as the final product, and focus on developing your skills.
- **Use Campus Resources:** Once the semester begins, take advantage of writing centers and workshops to enhance your writing abilities and gain confidence.
- **Embrace Challenges:** View writing assignments as opportunities to grow and challenge yourself, rather than obstacles to overcome quickly.
- **Reflect on Your Progress:** Regularly assess your development and celebrate improvements, no matter how small, to stay motivated.
- **Prioritize Academic Integrity:** Always aim to produce original work that reflects your understanding and effort, reinforcing your commitment to and habit of integrity in your studies.

By following these tips, you'll become more confident in your own thinking, reading, and writing skills, and avoid the pitfalls of relying on AI for your academic work.



MYTH #4

MYTH #4: COLLEGE ACADEMIC ADVISORS ALWAYS KNOW BEST

DEBUNKING THE MYTH:

Many academic advisors aim to faithfully assist students in their academic journeys, while others, especially in some for-profit colleges, double as student recruiters. This may well mean a conflict of interest, and a student's best interests may not be at the top of their list of priorities.

If this sounds cynical, you may benefit from reading some **articles** so you know who and what you're dealing with. Here are three for starters:

[10 Things to Know When Considering a For-Profit College](#)

[The Students Funneled into For-Profit Colleges](#)

[Nearly Half of Students Lack Key Academic Guidance](#)

Understanding a bit about how colleges operate (especially in for-profit and open-enrollment colleges) as well as having a sense of your current skill levels will empower you to make informed decisions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO?

Get to Know Some Ins and Outs

Research the College & Curriculum: College websites contain useful information that allow you to check out its business model (e.g. for-profit, nonprofit, online, hybrid, etc.), its enrollment requirements, its academic advising process, and descriptions and prerequisites of courses you will need to take, such as first-year English (English Composition).

But know that no matter which college you attend, it will offer a similar variation of the standard freshman English/writing course aimed at developing skills in critical thinking, close reading, modes of expository writing, conducting scholarly research, and putting together a cohesive academic, college-level paper.

Resource yourself: Below are some resources to help you be better able to advocate for your own needs and preferences:

- [College Board's Big Future: bigfuture.collegeboard.org](#)
 - Contains a search tool to help find schools based on various criteria
- [U.S. Board of Education's College Navigator: nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator](#)
 - Offers a wealth of data on colleges and universities

Learn how to work with an Academic Advisor

- [NACADA: Core advising Skills & Methods](#)
- [Meeting With Academic Advisors](#)



Congratulations!

You are one step closer to a successful first college semester!

“Hopefully, this guide and some of the resources included have you on your way to feeling more empowered to make wise decisions on behalf of your own higher education, particularly your first-year English course (also called English Composition).

By clarifying some common misconceptions and becoming proactive in countering them, you can approach your first college English course and semester with fewer fears and more realistic expectations!” ~ Professor MJ Stafford

Remember, Global Writing Support with Prof MJ is here to help with...

- The College Writing Prep Program: self-paced, targeted, affordable
- Individualized Virtual Tutoring

For more information, go to www.globalwritingsupport.com

Questions about any of the above content?

Feel free to email me at profmj@consult.globalwritingsupport.com

WWW.GLOBALWRITINGSUPPORT.COM