

For students who already have a draft.

Three focused lessons help students move beyond proofreading and make real revision decisions about specificity, length, and readiness.

REVISION IS MORE THAN FIXING COMMAS.

Students look at what a reader actually learns about them, what the essay does not need, and whether the final version still sounds like them.

COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 1

Could Anyone Else Have Written This?

Revision for specificity, voice, and details that sound like you.

THE TEST

Could this sentence belong to somebody else?

If yes, take another look at it.



COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 3

The Final Read

Before you submit, stop fixing individual sentences and read the essay as a whole.

THE QUESTION

What will a reader understand about me when they finish?

Keep coming back to that question.



THE THREE REVISION QUESTIONS

- 1 Could this sentence belong to somebody else?
- 2 What can I cut without cutting out the parts that sound like me?
- 3 What will a reader understand about me when they finish?

Students revise the draft they already have.

Each lesson includes direct instruction, concrete examples, and student pages that send writers back into their own essays.

COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 1

The Generic Sentence Test

A common topic is fine. A sentence that could belong to almost anyone needs more work.

A "My volunteer experience taught me empathy and gratitude."

What could make this more specific? _____

B "My family has always supported me through difficult times."

What could make this more specific? _____

C "Being captain helped me become a stronger leader."

What could make this more specific? _____

Try the swap test: could you change the activity, person, or situation and keep almost the same sentence?

COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 2

The 50-Word Cut

Work on your current draft. If you are already under 650, aim for 25 words anyway.

KEEP one line you will not cut

SHORTEN one piece of background

REMOVE one repeated idea

TIGHTEN one wordy sentence

CHECK read it again: did you lose anything important?

Word count before: _____ Word count after: _____ Words cut: _____

COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 3

Submission Check

Being tired of revising is not the same as being finished. Check these before you submit.

☐ The reader learns something real about me.

☐ My reflection fits the story instead of being added at the end.

☐ The essay still sounds like me.

☐ The prompt fits without controlling the essay.

☐ I am within the word limit.

☐ My ending stops before I explain the lesson again.

☐ I checked grammar, spelling, names, and application details.

The reader should understand this about me: _____

A line that sounds most like me: _____

COLLEGE ESSAY RUBRIC

The strongest essays give the reader a clear sense of the student behind the application. A dramatic topic is not required, and growth does not have to mean a complete transformation.

Name: _____ Period: _____ Final: ____ / 100

CRITERION	STRONG	SOLID	DEVELOPING	NOT SET
REVEALS THE WRITER 25 pts	25-20 Specific details, choices, and information make the writer easy to know. The choice could not easily belong to someone else.	20-15 The writer comes through clearly in most places. A few lines or details could be more specific.	15-10 The topic is clear, but much of the writing could belong to someone else. Some specific detail or thought is needed.	0-10 The essay tells what happened but gives little sense of the person writing it.
REFLECTION & INSIGHT 25 pts	25-20 Reflection fits the story and shows the writer's thinking, something he or she understands, or something he or she has learned.	20-15 Reflection is connected to the story. Though a few points may need more specific detail.	15-10 Reflection is present, but often feels predictable, or added after the story rather than developed through it.	0-10 The essay has little reflection, or it relates mostly on a generic level or makes a generalization.
STRUCTURE & FOCUS 25 pts	25-20 The essay starts in a clear place, develops the main idea, and ends with a clear point. The ending explains the point.	20-15 The structure is clear and mostly well-paced. Some background, reflection, or explanation could be tightened.	15-10 The essay has a workable shape but may wander, seem awkward, or spend too much time on background.	0-10 The draft is difficult to follow, comments, or mostly on a general level, or contains missing or unclear parts.
VOICE & LANGUAGE 25 pts	25-20 The language sounds natural, specific, and confident with the writer's voice. The writer's voice is clear and confident.	20-15 The voice is generally natural and clear. Some phrases may be awkward, or the writer's voice is not fully clear.	15-10 The writing often sounds formal, generic, or over-polished. The writer's natural voice appears only in places.	0-10 The language often does not sound like the student or seems heavily written. The student's voice is not clearly heard.
CONTROL & CONVENTIONS 10 pts	10-5 Sentences are complete and readable. Errors are minor and do not distract from the writing.	5 A few sentences have errors or awkward phrasing, but the essay is easy to read and within the word limit.	0-5 Repeated errors, awkward phrasing, or awkward sentences distract the reader. More than one error needs attention.	0-5 Frequent errors or awkward phrasing interfere with meaning in the draft. More than one error needs attention.

Scoring note: Choose a score within each band. Strong may be partial, solid, or unsatisfactory; students do not need a dramatic topic.

PLAYING KIBITZERS

AI + REVISION

Polished writing is not treated as proof of AI use. Students check whether outside help made a sentence clearer—or simply made it sound less like them.

WHAT YOU GET

Three revision lessons plus the tools to finish.

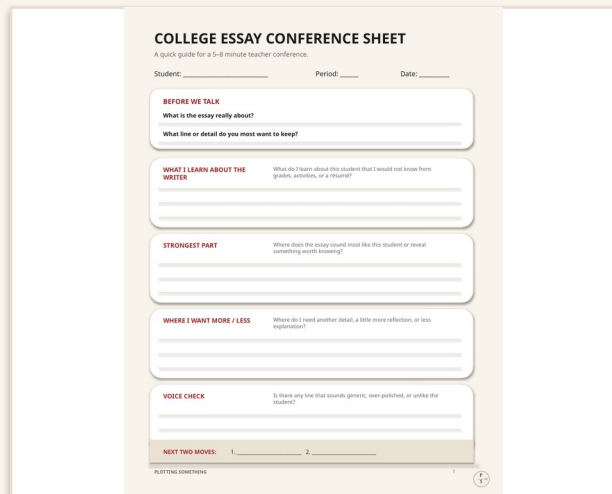
Use the workshop after your own college-essay assignment, with counselor drafts, or as the final revision sequence in a longer personal-statement unit.

INCLUDED

- 3 instructional PowerPoints
- 12 student-facing revision pages
- 3 teacher guides
- 100-point final rubric
- teacher conference sheet
- quick-start + pacing guide

BEST FOR

- students who already have a complete or nearly complete draft
- senior English or college-application writing
- short revision workshops before submission
- teacher or counselor conferences
- personal statements that need more than proofreading



COLLEGE ESSAY CONFERENCE SHEET
A quick guide for a 5-8 minute teacher conference.

Student: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

BEFORE WE TALK
What is the essay really about?
What line or detail do you most want to keep?

WHAT I LEARN ABOUT THE WRITER
What do I learn about this student that I would not know from grades, activities, or a resume?

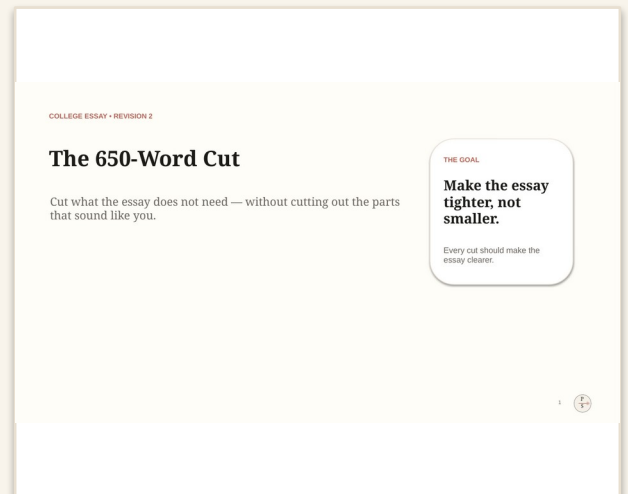
STRONGEST PART
Where does the essay sound most like this student or reveal something worth knowing?

WHERE I WANT MORE / LESS
Where do I need another detail, a little more reflection, or less explanation?

VOICE CHECK
Is there any line that sounds generic, over-polished, or unlike the student?

NEXT TWO MOVES: 1. _____ 2. _____

Plotting Something



COLLEGE ESSAY • REVISION 2

The 650-Word Cut

Cut what the essay does not need — without cutting out the parts that sound like you.

THE GOAL
Make the essay tighter, not smaller.
Every cut should make the essay clearer.

Plotting Something

These materials are also included in the complete Plotting Something College Essay Writing Unit.