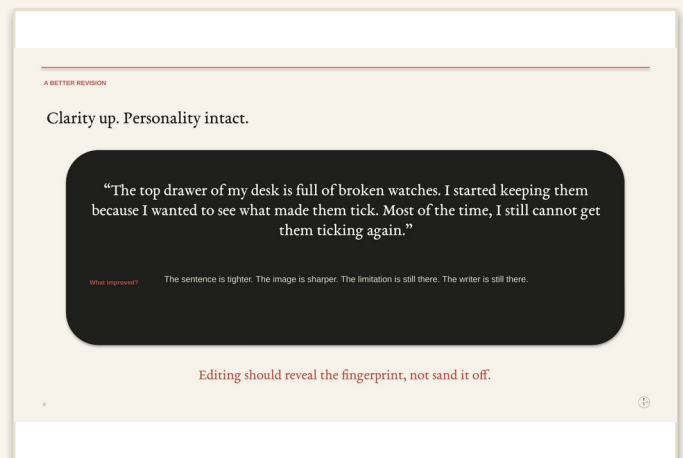
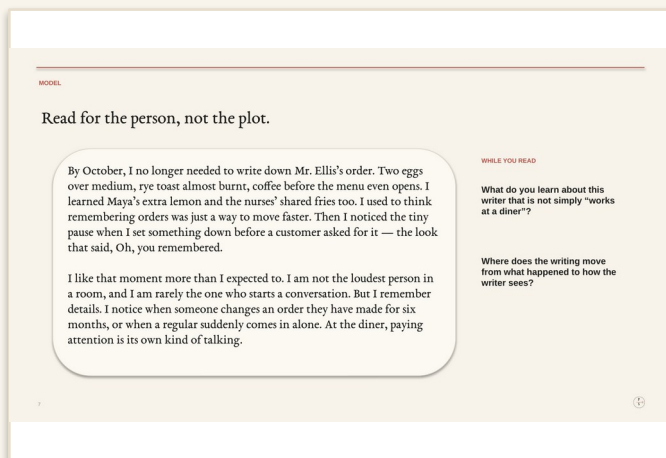


A 12-lesson unit from story-finding through final revision.

Built for students who insist nothing important has happened to them—and for teachers tired of reading the same generic personal essay.

THE EVENT IS NOT THE ESSAY. THE STUDENT IS.

LESSONS 1–4	Find material	Small stories • reflection • generic essay test
LESSONS 5–7	Develop the essay	Story + thinking • voice • prompt fit
LESSONS 8–10	Draft & revise	Shape • openings/endings • specificity
LESSONS 11–12	Finish	650-word cut • final read



Common topics are fine. Trauma is not required. Students do not have to claim one experience changed their lives. They learn how to make familiar material specific.

INSIDE THE UNIT

Students get help with the parts that are actually hard.

Each lesson includes direct instruction, examples written in a natural student voice, guided analysis, and a short piece of writing or revision.

PLAN THE IMPORTANT PARTS

COLLEGE ESSAY • LESSON 10

PLAN THE IMPORTANT PARTS

You do not need a paragraph-by-paragraph outline.

A five-paragraph outline asks, "What goes in paragraph 1, 2, 3...?"

Instead, ask:

- 1 Where does the reader enter?
- 2 What moment gets the most space?
- 3 What can I skip or summarize?
- 4 Where does my thinking change?
- 5 What idea or image do I want to leave with the reader?

You can change the plan once you start writing.

TEST FOR GENERIC WRITING

COLLEGE ESSAY • LESSON 10

A quick revision pass

BOX
a line that sounds unmistakably like you

UNDERLINE
a sentence that sounds vague or generic

STAR
a detail only you would probably know

REWRITE
one underlined sentence — not the whole draft

STUDENT WORKBOOK

COLLEGE ESSAY • LESSON 2

Think small.

For now, collect. Do not decide whether an idea is "good enough." Fragments are fine. Follow any detour that feels more interesting than the prompt.

ROUND 1 • PLACES & ROUTINES

- A place you know well enough to move through in the dark
- A route you could travel from memory
- A small ritual in your morning or evening
- A place where you act differently
- Something your family does the same way every time
- A routine you would miss if it disappeared

ROUND 2 • OBJECTS & HABITS

- Something in your room you have had for years
- An object you always carry, fix, save, lose, or borrow
- Something worn out that you refuse to replace
- A tiny habit other people notice you about
- A disease, loss, shelf, folder, or collection only you understand
- A smell, sound, or texture that instantly puts you somewhere

Write a word, phrase, image, or quick note — just enough to recognize the memory later.

FINAL READ

COLLEGE ESSAY • LESSON 12

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 premise fits without controlling the essay.
- ☐ I am within the word limit.
- ☐ My ending rings before I explain the lesson again.
- ☐ I checked grammar, spelling, names, and application details.

This reader should understand this about me: _____

A line that sounds most like me: _____

100-POINT RUBRIC

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 YET
REVEALS THE WRITER 25 pts	25-35 Specific details, choices, and a clear voice make the essay easy to read. The reader could not easily belong to someone else.	20-25 The writer comes through clearly in most places. A few lines or details could be more specific.	15-20 The topic is clear, but much of the writing is generic, or the writer is not clearly telling it.	0-15 The essay tells what happened but gives little sense of the person telling it.
REFLECTION & INSIGHT 25 pts	25-35 Reflection fits the story and shows the writer thinking, questioning, understanding, or understanding something in a specific way.	20-25 Reflection is meaningful and connected to the story through a few phrases or images more than they need to.	15-20 Reflection is present but often broad, formulaic, or added after the story rather than developed through it.	0-15 The essay has little reflection, or it only reads as a generic lesson or moral.
STRUCTURE & FOCUS 20 pts	18-20 The essay starts in a vivid place, develops the argument, and ends focused. The ending rings before it explains the point.	10-17 The structure is clear and mostly well-paced. Some background, repetition, or explanation could be tightened.	10-15 The essay has a somewhat clear but may not be as well-paced or focused as it could be.	0-10 The draft is difficult to follow, unfocused, or mostly a chronological reading without clear purpose.
VOICE & LANGUAGE 20 pts	18-20 The language sounds natural, specific, and connects with the world. The writer improves clarity, rhythm, and style through the writing. The final line fits the reader.	10-17 The writer is generally clear and uses a few phrases that are often, offbeat, or unique to the rest of the essay.	10-15 The writing often sounds formulaic, generic, or awkward. The writer's natural voice appears only in places.	0-10 The language often does not sound like the student or needs many revisions. The student should think about writing they would not normally choose.
CONTROL & CONVENTIONS 10 pts	9-10 Sentences are controlled and readable. Errors are rare and do not distract. The draft is worth the reader's word limit.	8 A few sentence-level errors or awkward spots remain, but the essay is easy to read and within the word limit.	6-7 Frequent errors, awkwardness, or unclear sentences distract the reader from the essay's meaning.	0-5 Frequent errors or unclear writing distract the reader from the essay's meaning. The draft does not meet submission requirements.

Scoring note: Choose a score within each band. Insights may be partial, nuanced, or unmet. Students do not need a dramatic transformation.

PLACEMENT SUGGESTIONS

A NOTE ON AI

The unit addresses AI during revision. Students check whether outside help made the essay clearer—or just made it sound less like them.

WHAT YOU GET

Everything you need to teach the unit from brainstorming through final revision.

The core sequence fits about 12 forty-minute class periods, with extra drafting or conference days added where you need them.

INCLUDED FILES

- 12 instructional PowerPoints
- 48 student-facing pages
- 12 teacher guides
- Unit overview + pacing guide
- 100-point final rubric
- Teacher conference sheet

WHAT THE UNIT EMPHASIZES

- ordinary experiences students can actually write about
- reflection without forcing a life lesson
- voice that still sounds like the student
- choosing the prompt after the story is taking shape
- revision for specificity, clarity, and concision
- a final draft that still sounds like the student

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 résumé?

STRONGEST PART
Where does the essay sound most like this student or reveal something you'd know?

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. _____

PLUFTING SOMETHING

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 YET
REVEALS THE WRITER 25 pts	25-23 Specific details, objects, and observations make the writer easy to see. The essay could not easily belong to someone else.	23-22 The writer connects through details to most places. A few lines or details could be more specific.	22-19 The topic is clear, but much of the writing could belong to many readers. More specific detail or thought is needed.	19-16 The essay tells what happened but gives little sense of the person telling it.
REFLECTION & INSIGHT 25 pts	25-23 Reflection fits the story and shows the writer thinking, questioning, understanding, or synthesizing something in a specific way.	23-22 Reflection is meaningful and connected to the story, though a few places may explain more than they need to.	22-19 Reflection is generic but after thought, reflection, or detail after the story rather than through it.	19-16 The essay has little reflection or a generic lesson or moral.
STRUCTURE & FOCUS 20 pts	20-18 The essay starts in a useful place, develops the important part, and ends focused. The ending may be a return to the place.	18-17 The structure is clear and mostly well done. Some background, examples, or expansion could be tighter.	17-15 The essay has a few unclear parts, examples, or expansion that could be tighter.	15-12 The draft is difficult to follow, unfocused, or missing a clear purpose.
VOICE & LANGUAGE 20 pts	20-18 The language sounds natural, specific, and connected with the writer. Examples are used without making the writing sound like the student.	18-17 The voice is generally natural and clear. A few places may sound generic or like the rest of the essay.	17-15 The writing often sounds generic, or some places may sound like the rest of the essay.	15-12 The language often does not sound like the student or seems overly formal, or missing a clear purpose.
CONTROL & CONVENTIONS 10 pts	9-18 Sentences are complete and readable. Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are correct. The essay is easy to read and clear for the reader.	8 A few sentences are not complete or readable. Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are mostly correct. The essay is easy to read and clear for the reader.	4-7 Repeated errors in punctuation, capitalization, or spelling. The reader must read carefully to understand the essay.	0-3 Frequent errors in punctuation, capitalization, or spelling. The reader must read carefully to understand the essay.

Scoring notes: Choose a score within each band. Bright may be partial, unmet, or unmet; students do not need a dramatic transformation.

PLUFTING SOMETHING

Prompt lesson updated for the 2026–27 Common App cycle. Check prompt wording annually before reuse.