

Students have an idea. Now they have to write the essay.

This five-lesson workshop focuses on the part between brainstorming and final revision: reflection, voice, prompt choice, structure, and the first real draft.

THE STORY IS ONLY THE START.

Students learn how to show what happened without losing the thinking, contradictions, details, and voice that make the essay personal.

ONE POSSIBLE WEAVE

The reflection does not stop the story. It changes how we read it.

"My brother climbed into the passenger seat with one cleat untied and his shin guards in his hands. I told him we were already late. I sounded exactly like my mother, which was annoying mostly because I could hear it. At every red light, he tried to finish getting dressed without dropping anything under the seat. I kept thinking that I was the organized one in this car, even though my backpack on the floor still had three permission slips I had forgotten to turn in. By the time we reached the field, I had repeated the same three instructions my mother always gives me before I leave the house."

Notice: the reflection is small. It creates contradiction, voice, and self-awareness without pausing for a speech.

A BETTER REVISION

Clarity up. Personality intact.

"The top drawer of my desk is full of broken watches. I started keeping them because I wanted to see what made them tick. Most of the time, I still cannot get them ticking again."

What improved? The sentence is tighter. The image is sharper. The limitation is still there. The writer is still there.

Editing should reveal the fingerprint, not sand it off.

THIS WORKSHOP HELPS STUDENTS:

- weave reflection into a scene instead of saving it for the end
- revise language that sounds generic or over-polished
- choose a prompt without reshaping the story to fit it
- plan the essay before drafting every event in order
- write openings and endings without gimmicks or a forced life lesson

Students work on the essay they are actually writing.

Each lesson includes direct instruction, student-style examples, guided analysis, and a short piece of drafting or revision.

COLLEGE ESSAY - DRAFTING 1

Weave Your Own Paragraph

Start with a moment. Then make room for your mind.

Story topic: _____

Write the moment first (4-6 sentences). Keep it concrete.

Now underline one place where the reader needs access to your thinking.

Add 1-2 sentences of reflection there. Try one thinking move:

I started noticing...

I had assumed... until...

Part of me still...

I realized this was not the first time...

Your reflection:

COLLEGE ESSAY - DRAFTING 2

Audit Your Own Paragraph

Notice first. Revise second.

✓ **KEEP** sounds like me and says what I mean

! **PROTECT** a detail or phrase that feels unmistakably mine

- **REVISIT** generic, inflated, vague, or unlike me

Copy one - sentence from your draft:

What is wrong with it?

☐ too vague

☐ too formal

☐ too generic

☐ too polished

☐ not quite true

☐ just not me

Revise it for clarity + specificity, not sophistication:

COLLEGE ESSAY - DRAFTING 3

Prompt Fit Test

Try a few prompts. You can change your mind later.

PROMPT OPTION 1 Prompt # _____

What would I focus on? _____ What would I have to leave? _____

Does this still feel like my essay? YES / NOBRIE / NO

PROMPT OPTION 2 Prompt # _____

What would I focus on? _____ What would I have to leave? _____

Does this still feel like my essay? YES / NOBRIE / NO

PROMPT OPTION 3 Prompt # _____

What would I focus on? _____ What would I have to leave? _____

Does this still feel like my essay? YES / NOBRIE / NO

COLLEGE ESSAY

MAKE A SIMPLE PLAN

Use the story and prompt you chose in Drafting 3.

STORY

Where can the reader enter once the story gets interesting?

MAIN MOMENT

Which moment deserves the most scene time?

SWITCH BACKGROUND

What can you cover quickly?

FOCUS ON CHANGE

Where does your thinking change, sharpen, or get more complicated?

ENDING IDEA

What idea, image, or question might stay with the reader?

You can change this once you start drafting.

PROMPT NOTE

Drafting 3 uses plain-language summaries of the 2026–27 Common App prompts and reminds students to check the official application for exact wording.

WHAT YOU GET

Five lessons plus a realistic drafting-day plan.

The instructional sequence is five class periods, but students need enough drafting time between the structure lesson and the beginnings/endings lesson to build a real working draft.

INCLUDED

- 5 instructional PowerPoints
- 20 student-facing pages
- 5 teacher guides
- quick-start + pacing guide

SUGGESTED USE

- students already have a story idea
- add one full drafting day after Drafting 4
- use Drafting 5 once students have enough of the essay to judge the opening and ending
- move into a separate final-revision workshop when the draft is complete

COLLEGE ESSAY: LESSON 5

Page 1 • Expand or Compress?

Use this page to decide which parts of your story become space.

EXPAND

Show down when the reader needs to see or hear the moment.

- ☐ A moment that reveals something about me
- ☐ A conversation or detail the reader needs
- ☐ A place where my thinking shifts

COMPRESS

Move quickly when the reader only needs the fact.

- ☐ Background I can explain in one sentence
- ☐ Repeated examples that prove the same point
- ☐ Three(+) time between important moments

One part of my story I should probably rethink: _____

COLLEGE ESSAY

SHORT ESSAY: TWO ENDINGS

The less explained ending is stronger here.

EXPLAIN THE MORAL

I learned that failure is not something to fear, but an opportunity to grow. Fixing wrenches taught me to stay curious, keep trying, and believe in my ability to solve difficult problems.

The essay already did this work.

END WITH THE QUESTION

The watch still does not run. I keep it anyway, in the top drawer with six others. Every few weeks, I take one apart and see if I can get a little farther than I did last time.

Specific and relevant.

The second ending gives us one last detail instead of telling us what to think.

These five lessons are also included as Lessons 5–9 in the complete Plotting Something College Essay Writing Unit.