

How to Refine the College Essay

1. What if you think your essay is terrible?

- Expect that any first draft will need to go through many revisions.
- Make sure that what you've written is salvageable and can be made better through editing.
- If you think what you've written is terrible and can't be improved, then start over.
- Make sure that you have a good story to tell and that the story is all about you.

2. How do you edit your essay's content?

- Look at the parts you like the least and see if you can add more information to make your point clear.
- Some parts of the essay that you dislike can be improved by writing less and more succinctly or even deleting much of it.
- See if your essay flows well. Is it easy to understand and does it have a rhythm?
- Make sure your essay has a "focus," and that every part, paragraph, and sentence contributes to that focus. Do not wander away from your focus.

3. How do you edit for style?

- Look at the details of your essay and make sure every sentence is carefully crafted?
- This does not mean grabbing a thesaurus to add more sophisticated vocabulary. You want to maintain your own voice, and it's easy for a reader to tell when you lose your voice.
- Be sure to eliminate all spelling and grammar mistakes. Improve transitions, vary sentence length, use active voice, and make sure each word is used correctly.

4. Have others read your essay.

- Someone new can point out mistakes that you are too close to notice.
- Ask someone who will provide honest, helpful criticism. This may be a teacher or a very smart friend.
- Have this person read your essay, and then ask him or her what the main point of the essay is.
- Ask your reader what parts are best and worst; what's confusing, missing, or doesn't belong; and if there are grammar or spelling errors.
- General comments are not helpful; your reader must be brutally honest to be helpful.

5. In the end it's your essay.

- Make only the corrections you believe will improve your essay.