

warm-up: appealing to the senses

Read the following excerpts from two real-life personal statements. Then, fill in the chart summarizing the sensory details each author used.

"It feels good out here!" I couldn't help but say it twice to my friends Chris, Mike, and Jay. We had been in the house since early evening playing Fortnite on Xbox. We decided to make ham sandwiches and go sit out on the front porch. We went outside at around 10 o'clock with our food and some Pepsi to enjoy the nice, cool night. The time passed so quickly that what seemed an hour turned into three. Around 1:15 am we noticed a decline in the warm temperature so we decided to head inside for the night. . .

from "I Am" by Dale Scott



Things you can almost see	Things you can almost feel	Things you can almost smell
Things you can almost taste	Things you can almost hear	Overall Tone:

For as long as I can remember, fireworks have been an important part of my life. On nights of celebration, such as the Fourth of July and Cinco de Mayo, I would cross the long street from my neatly kept apartment building to the lush green park next door. The warm air carried the familiar smells of late night barbecues and sounds of upbeat Spanish music. I loved to watch the clear dark sky burst into colorful flowers of light, dancing fearlessly as the music from the crowds below cheered them on. Even though the nights would end too soon, the fireworks would stay with me.

from "Firecracker" by Monica Ferguson



Things you can almost see	Things you can almost feel	Things you can almost smell
Things you can almost taste	Things you can almost hear	Overall Tone:

show, don't tell

As you learned last week, good writing has heartbeat. But how do you add heartbeat to your own writing? One way is by learning to show your readers what you mean instead of telling them.

Telling	<p><i>I'm a hard worker, sometimes in a day I work like 9 hours. It's not so much that I have to work these hours, I just want to. I just like to keep myself busy. I go to high school, even though I work I still maintain a GPA of 2.6. I'm also a member of the movie club. I want to become a lawyer, so I can help people get out of trouble and stay out of trouble.</i></p> <p>Why? This person has chosen to summarize their resume, and is telling the reader how great they are.</p>
Showing	<p>Instead, they should choose just one example from their resume, describe it in detail, and really show the reader that they are a passionate, hard worker:</p> <p><i>Vicious hitting, spectacular plays, and comeback victories. My love and respect for football is immense. I've only been playing two and some half years and my coach sees in me a skilled and sculptured player. Football completes me. The problems I face within my overcrowded household, nine people in a two-bedroom duplex, and parents that seem to lash out at the very thought of my existence, fade away when I strap on the chinstrap of my helmet and step out on the field.</i></p>
Telling	<p><i>When I was nine years old, I graduated from elementary school and my father was there at the ceremony. He told me he was going to come pick me up the next morning. Then I got a call from my grandmother that my Daddy just got shot in his heart. When I was 17 years old, my mother died. Before my mother died, she gave me some inspiring words to motivate my life. My mother said that you take one day at a time and you put God first in your life. I felt sad about my mother and father passing away, but I still have to make it, day by day.</i></p> <p>Why? This person has been through a lot of tragedy in their life, but by just telling what they went through, it's hard for the reader to really connect and feel their loss.</p>
Showing	<p>Instead, focus on one incident in your life, even if it is difficult or painful, and show what it felt like to be in that moment. Your readers will make an emotional connection and will be affected by your words:</p> <p><i>As we walked that long hallway of pain and repressed memories we were more confident than ever. We pulled around the corner and took the last breath of our miserable lives. There we stood and listened, listened to the horrible sound of death, the sound we have repressed and long forgotten since that day. There we are turning the corner tightly clutched up against the wall so he won't see us. We saw one of the most vivid and unforgettable memories of our lives, our mother whose face looked like a shineless, bleeding moon. We attacked him with all the courage in our hearts. We attacked one of the two people that gave us life. Reaching for any object I could find, a vase, a cup, a utensil, it didn't matter we wanted him out of our house. . .</i></p>

making it **real!**

Read through your first draft (which you completed during Lesson 7) or have a friend read through it. Highlight any sentences that are telling, not showing. You will come back to these sentences later this week to revise them, and make them into "showing" statements.

TALK IT OUT
 Read the examples above, and discuss how the authors choose words and phrases to show personal strength, convey heartbeat, and make their stories more effective.

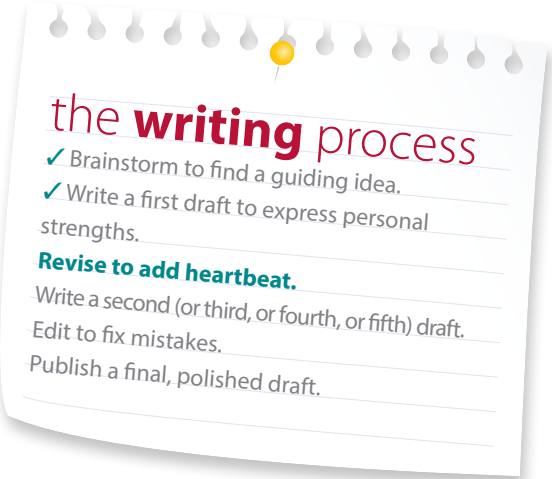
STEP 2: Outline your personal statement.

revising for effectiveness

Last week, you identified a guiding idea and wrote a rough draft of your personal statement. This week, you'll focus on making your story more powerful and more effective.

Effective writing has:

- ✓ A logical **structure** — a beginning, middle, and an end
- ✓ Supporting and memorable **details** — A story isn't just about what happened in the end. It is also about how you got there and what happened along the way.
- ✓ **Heartbeat** — words, phrases, and sentences which catch the reader's attention and make them remember your main idea



What all personal statements share:

- Most personal statements are **one to one and a half pages** long (about 500–1,000 words).
- Most personal statements are written in **first person**, using "I" instead of "he/she."
- The **introduction** starts off with a power statement which catches the reader's attention.
- The **body** tells a story which demonstrates your personal strengths.
- The **conclusion** sums up the story and leaves the reader wanting more.

How personal statements can be different or unique:

- You can choose an **outline** which best fits your story.
- You can choose the **tense** (past, present, future, or a combination).
- You can choose the **tone** (funny, sad, humorous, optimistic).

adding structure: outlining your personal statement

The first draft you wrote in Lesson 7 captures the guiding idea of your personal statement. Now, it's time to revise your story to give it structure.

Outline for:

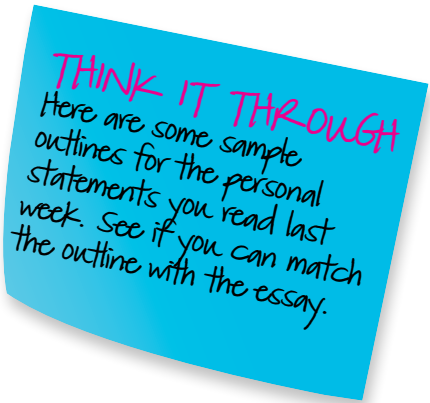
- | | |
|---------------|--|
| ___ Pinpoquin | Paragraph 1: Tell a shocking lie |
| ___ Kpodon | Paragraph 2: One sentence — refute the lie |
| ___ Dale | Paragraphs 3–6: Tell a story |
| ___ Rachel | Paragraph 7: Return to the lie, make it my own |

Outline for:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| ___ Pinpoquin | Paragraph 1: Introduce a character |
| ___ Kpodon | Paragraphs 2–6: Tell a story about that character |
| ___ Dale | Paragraphs 7–8: Connect the story to your life |
| ___ Rachel | Paragraph 9: Conclusion, sum it up |

Outline for:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| ___ Pinpoquin | Paragraph 1: Begin the story, explain the setting |
| ___ Kpodon | Paragraphs 2–4: Tell a story |
| ___ Dale | Paragraph 5: Conclude the story, explain its significance |
| ___ Rachel | |



Create an outline for your personal statement that includes an introduction, body, and conclusion.

introductions: a powerful start

The purpose of any introduction, whether it is the beginning of a story, a newspaper article, or even a movie or TV show, is to get your attention. A boring beginning usually means a boring experience, right?

GOOD IDEAS

Not sure how to start? Think about your favorite movies for inspiration! Try these suggestions:

✓ **Start with the ending, and then flash-back to tell the whole story.**

The horse had thrown me. I was on my back in the grass, writhing in pain. My leg was broken, and all I could think was, "How did a girl from the worst neighborhood in Brooklyn end up on a horse in the mountains of Colorado, anyway?"

✓ **Start with a voice-over from the narrator.**

I said to myself, "This isn't right! No one should be treated like this. I'm going to make sure this never happens at my school again." And, I vowed that I would make a difference from that moment on.

✓ **Start with the most exciting moment, and explain it in detail. Then flash back.**

My brother, Sali and I are in the living room watching Barney and Sesame Street. There is a loud banging at the door. I hesitate to open it... But the knock becomes louder and a woman calls out, "Open the door!" Terrified, I obey.

✓ **Start with a series of images or pictures and then transition to the real story.**

Vicious hitting, spectacular plays, and comeback victories. My love and respect for football is immense.

✓ **Start with movement: walking in, walking out, running, jumping...**

As I walk into the cathedral, the air thickens and crackles with static. After bouncing on my brother's neatly fixed bed, I found myself standing on the top of an old milk crate looking through his top drawer.

BAD IDEAS

DO NOT:

✗ **Introduce yourself:**

Hello, my name is Dale Scott and I am an African-American from Colorado.

✗ **Be childish or immature:**

Once upon a time...

✗ **Use a cliché:**

It was a dark and stormy night...

✗ **Be too obvious:**

I'm going to tell you a story about how I demonstrated a personal strength.

✗ **Tell, not show:**

The reason I should go to college is because I am smart.

making it real!

Go back to your most recent draft of your personal statement and rewrite your introduction using one of these suggestions, or one of your own. You may write your new introduction in the space provided later this week.

BIG IDEA

Because personal statements are so short, your introduction must start off with a bang. There's no time to waste; your essay, just like you, is on a mission.

the body: your story

In the body of your personal statement is where you actually tell your story. Include not only what happened but also the details your readers will need to feel like they are really there. Include the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of your world to make it as real as possible. Use sensory details to create a picture in the mind of your readers and to show meaning.

Signs of a Healthy Body

- Tell only one story.
- Focus that story on only the events and details that demonstrate YOUR strengths.
- Don't tell a sob story UNLESS it has real meaning to you.
- Show, don't tell!!

the conclusion: back to the beginning

Your personal statement should end just as strongly as it began, with powerful statements. Your reader should want to read more and more, and should put down your paper thinking, "Wow! I wonder what else that kid has to say?" rather than, "Thank goodness that's over."

GOOD IDEAS

Just like for introductions, movies are a great place to get inspiration for your conclusion.

- ✓ **Leave it open for a sequel.**
I have resolved to make a mark — not one that is made by taking something away, like a scratch or a gouge, but by adding something, and more importantly, revealing what is already there.
- ✓ **Return to where you started.**
In this way, my grandfather and my land will never perish.
- ✓ **Ask a provocative question (just make sure it isn't so far removed from your guiding idea that it doesn't make sense with the rest of the personal statement).**
If I can succeed and meet my goals, does that mean anyone can triumph over 200 years of racist oppression?
- ✓ **Suggest outcomes, results, or consequences.**
Now I finally know my way out of this situation. I have to push my education past high school. I have to do well in college. I have to find a rewarding job that will bring up my self-confidence. After doing all these things I have to, then I will get to lead a happy and fulfilling life.
- ✓ **Refer to the opening paragraph ("the hook") by using parallel images and thoughts or key words.**
I left my whistle on the mountain that day — not because I couldn't find it, but because I no longer needed it.

BAD IDEAS

DO NOT:

- ✗ **Be too obvious:**
Therefore, ... In conclusion ... I learned a lot from that experience.
- ✗ **Be childish or immature:**
And they all lived happily ever after.
- ✗ **Use a cliché:**
All's well that ends well. And then I woke up. It was all just a dream! The end. OR IS IT?
- ✗ **Tell, not show:**
Because of everything I went through, I know I'll be a success at college.

making it real!

Go back to your most recent draft of your personal statement and rework your body to focus it on one story. Add details to show, not tell what you want to demonstrate.

making it real!

Go back to your most recent draft of your personal statement and rewrite your conclusion using one of these suggestions or one of your own.

STEP 4: Write a second draft of your personal statement, focusing on flow and structure.

your second draft

Write a second draft of your personal statement, focusing on:

- Creating a powerful introduction
- Telling one story in your body which shows what it was like to be there and causes your reader to make an emotional connection
- Ending with a powerful conclusion that ties the whole thing together

STEP 5: Work with your peers to revise and edit your personal statement.

peer review: revising for effectiveness

Sometimes, the best way to figure out if your essay is having the effect you want it to have is to have someone else read it and listen to their comments and feedback.

Peer Review

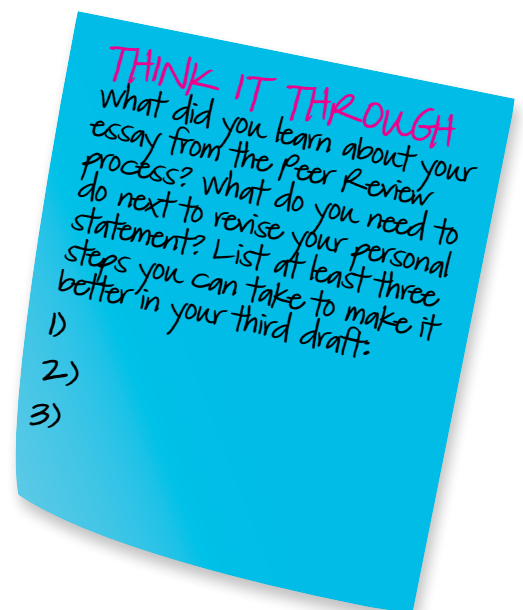
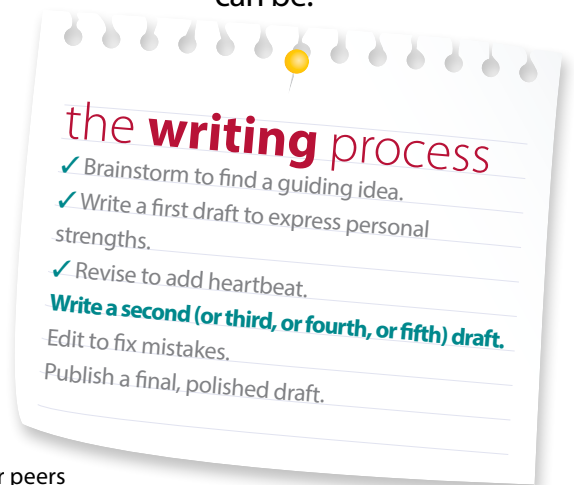
Share the second draft of your personal statement with one or more friends. Your peers should read your essay and pay attention to your ideas ONLY, not to your spelling and punctuation. Then, ask them the following questions, and use their answers to guide your final draft.

- What do you think is the guiding idea of this essay?
- What personal strengths do you think I am demonstrating?
- What parts of the essay have heartbeat?
- Are there any parts of the essay that need more heartbeat? Are there any places where I am telling when I should be showing?
- Is my introduction powerful? Why or why not?
- Does the story in my body make sense? Do you need any other details to understand it better?
- Is my conclusion powerful? Why or why not?
- If this was your essay, what would you do to improve it?

STUDENT HANDOUT

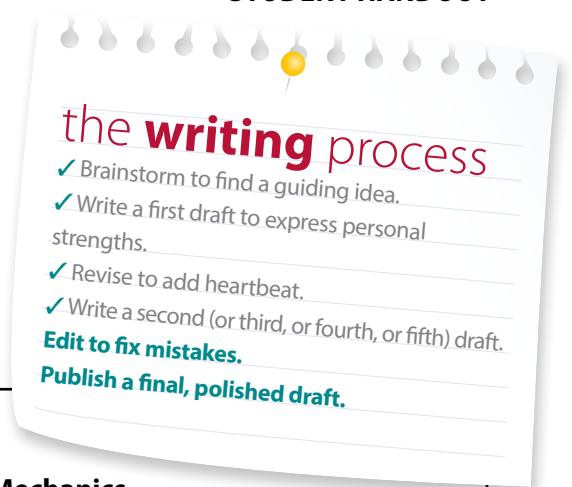
BIG IDEA

Your conclusion is the last idea you can leave your reader with. Make sure it is as strong as it can be.



editing and publishing your work

Now that you are confident that the ideas and content of your essay are at their best, it's time to edit your work. Editing is the process of finding and correcting simple mistakes in formatting, spelling, punctuation, mechanics, grammar, and usage. Editing is not changing your ideas!



CHECKLIST FOR EDITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Format

- 2–2½ pages (approximately)
- 12-point font size
- Double-spaced lines
- Times New Roman font style
- Pages numbered
- Your name (first and last) on each page in header or footer

Mechanics

- Spell-check
- Capitalization check
- Grammar check
- Punctuation check

STEP 6: Request **Letters of Recommendation** from two to three references.

putting the pieces together

In Unit 2, you worked to reflect on your personal strengths, and created documents which will demonstrate those strengths (show, not tell) on any application you complete this year. The last piece you'll need to create are your Letters of Recommendation.

STEPS TO FORMALLY REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

- Lesson 6: Identify excellent references.
- Lesson 6: Informally ask your references to recommend you.
- Lesson 8: Print out copies of your **College List**, resume, and personal statement (one for each reference).
- Lesson 8: Fill out a copy of the **Recommendation Request Sheet** (one for each reference).
- Lesson 8: Provide each of your references with a **Request Packet**.
- Lesson 12: Provide your references with envelopes, stamps, and forms.

You've already identified the 3–5 adults whom you think will make good references for you. Hopefully, you've already approached these adults to ask them if they're comfortable providing a reference for you. Now it's time for the next step: formally requesting a Letter of Recommendation.

Inform your references that you'll need the final Letters of Recommendation in a few weeks. By Lesson 12, you should have them all finished and ready to be mailed.

Be sure to get a copy for your portfolio of each Letter of Recommendation.

UNIT 2: SENIOR PORTFOLIO CHECK-IN

By the end of Unit 2, (if you did the entire unit), you should have completed the following **Senior Portfolio** items:

- Created an **action plan** to meet your short-term academic goals, Lesson 5
- Built a resume, Lesson 6
- Drafted and finalized a Personal Statement, Lesson 8
- Formally requested 3 Letters of Recommendation from adult references, Lesson 8

You should have completed the following milestones:

- Short-term Goals, and **Goals into Action**, Lesson 5
- Resume, Lesson 6
- Personal Statement Draft and Final, Lessons 7 & 8

Give yourself a grade for each of the above items.

Based on the above, how would you evaluate your progress this year?

- Ahead of the game On track A little behind Off track

What can you do to improve?

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION REQUEST SHEET

For colleges, scholarships, jobs, and other program applications

About Me

My name:

Telephone: Email:

About You

Name of recommendation writer:

Our relationship: We have known each other for: Years

I chose you to recommend me because:

About this recommendation

This recommendation will be used for (check all that apply):

- College applications
- Scholarship applications
- Job applications
- My portfolio

This Letter of Recommendation is (check one):

- Open** — You are allowed and encouraged to share the contents of your letter with me.
- Confidential** — The contents of this letter are private. You should not share the contents with me.

With your permission, I would like to keep a copy of this Letter of Recommendation on file for the next year as I complete my postsecondary plans. Is this okay with you? Yes No *If yes, please provide me with a copy of the letter.*

I need this Letter of Recommendation no later than

Attached to this form are my **College List**, resume, and personal statement. These items should give you an idea of which personal strengths I am most proud of and wish to emphasize. Additionally, I would like for you to talk about:

I will provide you with mailing instructions and materials in a few weeks. Thank you for your support of my postsecondary plan.