

Course Intro Essay: Refining your first draft

Make sure you've answered all of the prompt questions. (There are four.) Make sure your essay has an introduction and a conclusion—refer to your essay prompt for ways to write an effective introduction and an effective (i.e., non-repetitious) conclusion.

Keep going. The critical thinking questions on your paper are to help you continue thinking your way fully through an idea. In the process of answering the questions I've provided, you'll have to figure out what your real main point or perspective is.

Make sure your essay is coherent. How do the ideas in one paragraph relate to or build upon other paragraphs to tell a single story? Think of writing as leaving breadcrumbs (like Hansel and Gretel!) that connect details or ideas across paragraphs—pick a single paragraph from the middle of your essay: Does it link explicitly or directly to a unique idea found in another paragraph? Show how the range of things you mention are connected.

Watch out for repetition or redundancy. Read your essay two sentences at a time (e.g., first sentence and second sentence of a paragraph; second sentence and third sentence of a paragraph)—do these two sentences repeat each other? Remove the weaker one.

This essay is about you: your ideas, your experiences, your goals—the common thread is you. Look for sentences about “people” or generalizations about the world: do they support the central idea of exploring yourself and your experience? (Hint: probably not.) Remove them and see what holes remain or what space you've freed up for specific examples, answering implicit questions, or following a line of thought more thoroughly.

If there's a pattern of error in your writing but you're not sure how to fix it on your own (e.g., run-on sentences, sentence fragments, past participles, subject-verb agreement), make an appointment at the **Writing Center (Library, 1st floor)** so you can learn the skills that will make all of your writing more effective. They can also help you with brainstorming or organization of your thoughts if that's a roadblock for you.

Follow formatting instructions: no heading, font size, length, margins, etc.

The techniques of editing (“ARMS”):

1. **Add.** Show why you think what you think. Provide examples.
2. **Remove.** remove anything (it could a word, or a sentence, or a half a page) that doesn't actually address your main point.
3. **Move.** Try to imagine someone reading this for the first time. What would be confusing about the order that things are presented in? You can change the order of paragraphs or of sentences within a paragraph and end up with a completely different essay.
4. **Substitute.** Try a different anecdote, a different example, or even a different word.

Dr. J's favorite editing suggestion:

Your best editor is an imaginary, insatiable three-year-old who says "How do you know" or "Why does that matter" after every single sentence. Does the narrative you're telling pass the "three-year-old test"? If not, then there's still more critical thinking to be done in order to fully flesh out your ideas (and make them toddler-proof!).