

Refine Your Personal Essay

Questions To Ask Yourself

- Is this me? Or, does it at least represent me how I want to be represented?
- Does the writing show what I can do?

General Tips

Own your essay. Hear and consider all of the feedback, but make your own decisions about your writing.

Use active voice rather than passive voice.

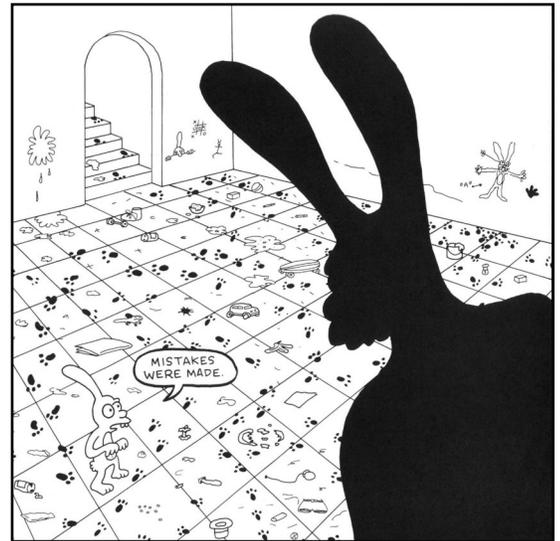
Have a coherent structure.

- Can the reader tell where you are going?
- Consider whether each paragraph has a particular purpose.
- Also think about whether each sentence has its own purpose.

Get rid of extra words and redundant statements. Even if you are under the word limit, tighten.

While you do want to come across as smart, only use words that you would actually use.

If you aren't pleased with your essay, throw it out and start another.



Life in Hell comic by Matt Groening

Process

Refine one or both of your essay drafts.

Work on your essay soon after you get feedback so that you remember which comments resonated with you.

Then, set your main essay aside for a couple of weeks. If ideas occur to you during this time, jot them down but don't change your work right away. You may decide against the changes. Work on shorter essays—why I want to go to X school and any others—that will be on your applications.

At the end of the summer, look back at your essay. Do you notice anything that could be strengthened? Are there any parts that make you uncomfortable? Does the essay capitalize on your strengths?

When you are pleased with the content and writing, work on editing. Ask someone for help. You are welcome to share your close-to-final draft as a Google Doc for feedback: marianne.stephens@k12.shorelineschools.org. (Please also email me at my usual marianne.stephens@shorelineschools.org address to let me know you have shared to my k12 account.) Be aware that I may have volunteers provide some feedback if I get swamped. If you prefer to have me review your essay, please let me know.

In the fall, you will be ready for essay reviews in English class and/ or during special events.

When you paste your essay into your application, check how it appears. Be sure that the application tool preserves the formatting that you want, and review your writing yet again for any errors.

Congratulate yourself that you got a head start!