

When Is It Good Enough?

*Letting Go of
the Imperfect
Essay*



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Webinar Resources:

wowwritingworkshop.com/CyndyMcDonald

Overview

- Managing Time & Expectations
- Content, Structure and Polish
- Common Issues
- A New Approach

Three Stages

Content



Structure



Polish

Pre-Draft Review

Solidify

During brainstorming, solidify theme

Confirm

Confirm theme before draft

Return

Return to theme during reviews

Know Why

Make sure students know WHY they chose a topic

Time Savers

- Think like a reviewer, not an editor
- Template responses to common problems
- Set a timer
- Think big picture, not sentence by sentence

Technique

Read once

Read again, mark a few things

Respond

Content Review

Does the essay answer the prompt?

Can you tell why the writer chose this topic?

Is the essay about the student, or is it really about the place, person or experience featured in the essay?

Does it illustrate a trait your student wants to share with colleges?

Does it tell colleges something meaningful about the writer that they could not find out from the rest of the application package?

Does the story sound like a teenage writer?

Content Review (Narrative Review)

General observations – concepts, intention, focus

Questions

Writing exercises

Structure Review

Does the first paragraph make you want to keep reading?

Does the essay move smoothly from beginning to end?

Is the essay ever redundant?

Structure Review (Comment Review)

Notes in margins (Google doc comments or Word Review mode)

Specific observations – lines, paragraphs, sections

Writing exercises

Polish Review

Does the essay include the same verb tense throughout?

Has the student avoided sentence fragments and run-on sentences?

Is the punctuation correct and consistent?

Is every word spelled correctly?

Does the writer feel confident and proud of the work?

Polish Review (Editorial Review)

Minor line edits

Punctuation, grammar, etc.

Balance willingness & ability

Awareness and Change

Differentiate

Differentiate between content, structure and polish

Read

Read before diving in with comments

Think

Think like a reviewer, not an editor

Who Owns the Essay?

Guidelines for Reviewers

How long should it take?

- Never spend more than an hour.
- Rarely spend more than 30 minutes.
- If you do more with content development up front, you will spend less time reviewing during the polish phase.

How to improve:

- Keep track of your time.
- Pay attention to common sticky spots. What bothers you? Where do you get stuck?

Resources

- Slides
- Professional Resources: Essay Review Guidelines
- Parent Article: How to Help without Taking Over
- Parent Article: Is an “A” English Paper a College Essay?
- Info about training and more

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