



Steps to Writing the Personal Statement Essay

Step 1: Brainstorming (The Most Important Step)

Brainstorming is the foundation of a strong personal statement and takes time. This step involves deep self reflection and should never be rushed. Effective brainstorming is a process best done with a trained coach like Sharon, who knows how to ask the right questions and guide students beyond surface level ideas. When done well, brainstorming flushes out the characteristics, values, and perspectives that make a student who they are — their very essence. This process helps students identify what truly matters to them and what they want colleges to understand about who they are. Only after brainstorming is complete should a student begin writing.

Step 2: The First Draft (Getting the Story Out)

The goal of the first draft is content, not perfection. Students should focus on writing as much content as possible, using specific examples that illustrate the characteristics uncovered during brainstorming. At this stage, students should not worry about structure, spelling, grammar, or word count. Getting as much of the story onto the page as possible is the most important part of this step.

Step 3: Revising (Developing Ideas and Purpose)

Revising begins after receiving comments and questions from the coach. This stage focuses on organization, idea development, and clarity of purpose. Students consider whether anything is missing, whether the essay's purpose is clear, and whether the focus remains on the student rather than a place, person, or experience. Key revision questions include: What happened? Why does it matter? Does this essay illustrate a trait the student wants colleges to understand? Does it reveal something meaningful that is not already evident elsewhere in the application?

Step 4: Editing (Refining the Message)

Once the content, organization, and overall message are established, editing begins. This step focuses on refining sentence structure, transitions, and clarity while preserving the student's

authentic voice. At this stage, the essay should already say what it needs to say — editing ensures it says it well.

Step 5: Proofreading (Polish and Precision)

Proofreading is the final review before submission. Students check for consistent verb tense, correct punctuation, spelling accuracy, and sentence flow. Final questions to ask include: Does the essay sound like me? Am I confident and proud of this work? When the answer is yes, the essay is ready to be shared with colleges.