

*Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps*  
Unit Guide

This unit is designed with several outcomes in mind. First and foremost, students will compose a polished personal statement. Through the process of writing and revising, they'll also come to a better understanding of themselves as writers. Finally, they'll receive vital practice in reading and using informational text.

Each of the 10 lesson plans includes:

- a brief overview of the lesson
- an estimate of the time needed
- [Common Core Standards](#) covered
- step-by-step instructions
- a materials list
- post-lesson evaluation questions

A set of handout masters directly follows the lesson plans.

Supplementary materials to aid you throughout the entire unit include:

- two sample unit calendars
- suggestions for grading and feedback
- suggestions for electronic submissions
- suggestions for alternate assignments

## Finding Your Topic: Pre-Unit Brainstorming

This particular lesson plan is designed to jump-start students' creative thinking. It consists of a series of writing exercises, to be completed as warm-up activities when students enter class. When students have completed all of them, they'll have plenty of raw material to use toward their personal statements.

Students should complete all of the exercises before the actual unit commences. Hopefully, this will minimize any feelings of pressure or anxiety that may lead to writer's block.

This activity consists of 19 entry tasks. Do one entry task per day at the start of class. After students understand your expectations regarding entry tasks, you should only spend 5-10 minutes on them per day. The final entry task may take a bit longer, as it requires reflection on the part of the students. Alternatively, this final task could be assigned as homework.

### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### **What To Do:**

1. Many teachers incorporate warm-up activities into their standard classroom routine. A warm up is an entry task that students can complete independently, with no teacher instruction—giving you time to take attendance, collect homework, etc. If you've already created this routine in your classroom, you won't have to share any new expectations with your students. However, if you haven't set up a routine of warm-up activities, explain your new expectations. You want students to enter the classroom and check the board (or projector screen) for the day's warm-up. They should be working on the activity when class begins, and they should keep writing until you signal a halt.
2. Prior to class, post or write the first question where all students can see it from their seats: "What has been the hardest thing in your life?" As students enter, direct them to write down the date and prompt question. After getting this down, they should immediately begin responding. After students are done, have them count up how many lines they wrote. They should write that number down in the margin.
3. Begin every day with a new prompt (see pages 31 and 32 for the remaining questions). After writing, students should always count up and write down how many lines they wrote. Some ideas that might help your students' output:
  - Emphasize that this is a brainstorming activity—you are not concerned with grammar or word choice so much as ideas. It may be liberating for some students to tell them you do not require complete sentences.
  - Be firm in your expectation that students will be writing the entire time that you've allotted. No putting down the pen and announcing "I'm done!" If students feel they've

exhausted the topic you gave them, they can always free-write about something else. They just have to keep writing.

- Students should at least attempt to answer the prompt question you've given them before they can move on to a topic of their choice.
- Promote a sense of safety by reminding students that these writing exercises are for their own benefit and, if necessary, for their eyes only. If they write something they don't wish you to read, they can fold that piece of paper before turning it in. You will respect their privacy.
- If you have social learners, they may want to share with one another directly after writing. Reassure them that the time for sharing will come—later.

4. The nineteenth entry task is a reflection that you may decide to give as homework instead. Ask students to skim over their work and respond thoughtfully to any or all of the following questions:

- Were these entry tasks relatively easy or difficult for you to complete? Somewhere in the middle? Explain.
- How hard was it for you to keep writing for the entire allotted time? Explain.
- Did your writing process change over time? Explain.
- Consider the original prompt questions as well as your responses to them. What did you find most interesting? Why?
- Again, look at the original prompt questions as well as your responses. What provoked the strongest reaction (positive or negative) from you? Why?
- Who are you as a writer? (This is meant to be an open-ended question—record any observations you feel are relevant.)

5. At the end of the 19 days, collect students' brainstorming exercises. It's not important for you to read them or give feedback. You just want to keep the exercises somewhere safe, so that nobody loses their work between now and the actual commencement of the unit. This assignment would be an excellent opportunity to skip grading. If you do choose to grade it, it may be best to grade purely based on participation. Alternatively, you may choose to read and respond only to the nineteenth exercise. If you do choose to offer feedback, it should all be positive. This will remain true through the early drafting stages.

### **What You Need:**

A copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps*

### **How Did It Go?**

Were students able to respond to the prompts? Could they spend the entire entry task time writing? Could they reflect on their experience at the end of the exercises? Do they have a better understanding of their own writing personality? Have they generated some raw material for their personal statements?

## Lesson Plan #2

### **Introduction to the Unit** (*Introduction and Step One*)

This is the first day of the actual unit. To open, you will discuss the college admissions essay and read Gelb's introduction. Students will read and process Step One for homework. You will check and reinforce their understanding the next day.

This lesson takes two days of class, though you may finish the activities early. It also includes homework.

#### **Common Core Standards Covered:**

**Standard (RI. 11-12.2)** – Determine two or more central ideas of text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; providing an objective summary of the text.

**Standard (RL. 11-12.3)** – Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered. How the characters are introduced and developed).

#### **What To Do:**

1. Seat students in small groups of 4-6. Have them discuss the college admissions process: do they know which schools they want to apply to? Do they understand all of the steps entailed in their application? What do they know about the essay? As groups discuss, eavesdrop to get a general sense of the mood and knowledge level in the room. Sum up what you're hearing for students and explain how the upcoming unit is going to assist them in writing their personal statement.
2. Depending on your student population, it may be necessary to teach aspects of the college application process—either to the whole class, or to a smaller group. Check with your colleagues and administration before deciding what you need to cover in your classroom. Your school might already have a calendar of events for student and family education (for instance, a “Frequently Asked Questions about the FAFSA” night).
3. Pass out a copy of *Conquering the College Essay* to each student. Read the preface and the introduction out loud together. Make sure everyone understands the important information they should be gleaning from this section: that the preface establishes Gelb's credibility, and that the introduction sets out the plan for this unit (and their essay writing process). If your students are familiar with the language of argumentation, you might ask them to analyze the preface and introduction in terms of [Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle](#).
4. Pass out a copy of Handout #1 to each student. Explain the homework. If you want them to analyze the four elements of the same story, have students write down the title before they go home.

5. For homework, students should read “Step One.” Remind students to read actively—highlighting or underlining, margin-noting, etc. Even if you’re working with library copies of these books, students can use Post-It notes to bookmark and annotate the text. After completing the reading, students should complete the first and second columns of the handout.

6. The next day in class, have students discuss the four elements in small groups and check what they wrote in the narrative column.

7. If you feel it is necessary, solidify students’ understanding with a ghost story, extended joke, or anecdote. Tell your story and have students take notes on the four elements. Immediately afterwards, review the correct answers and address any confusion.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #1 (one per student)

### **How Did It Go?**

What is the general stress level and mood in your class regarding the college admissions process? Is there anything you can/should do to ease the atmosphere? Do they understand Gelb’s four elements of a narrative? Can they apply that understanding to a previously read class text? To an oral anecdote, story, or joke?

### Steps Two and Three

In this lesson, students will choose an essay topic and point of view.

This lesson will take part of one class day. Students will also need several days at home to mull over their brainstorming work.

#### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard (W. 11-12.4)** – produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **What To Do:**

1. Pass back the brainstorming material students generated in Lesson Plan #1. Have students read over their writing. As they read, they should note anything that draws their attention. It may be one response to one particular exercise. It may be a word or theme that seems to emerge across several of the responses. After they read, they may wish to briefly discuss their writing with peers. (If you're short on class time, much of this step could be done for homework.)
2. Read the opening of Step Two to students (pages 25 and 26). See if anyone is surprised—after all, many students probably believe that the personal statement is exactly the place to “tout one’s achievements.” Then, pass out Handout #2. Tell students that this graphic organizer will help them select their essay topics. Remind students that, in order to be effective, writing must be composed with audience and purpose in mind.
3. Start with “purpose.” Yes, you want students to write down the obvious: the purpose of this essay is to get them into college. Remind students of what they read in a previous chapter: that the personal statement is basically their interview. Ask students to think about the excerpt you just shared out loud. Based on what they heard, what else do we need to know about purpose and how should their purpose drive what they do (and don’t do)?
4. Next, move on to “audience.” Help students reference *Conquering the College Essay* to figure out what they should do (and not do) in order to “capture the attention and interest” of their reader (pg. 25).
5. Tell students that they’ll finish the handout on their own. Explain your expectation that they will finish reading “Step Two” on their own before they pick a topic. They may pick a topic that they already started in their brainstorm, or they may pick something else. Either is fine. Do highlight the key information for students. They have two objectives—“finding a topic that will allow the real you to shine through and one that can be conveyed in a very limited amount of space” (pg. 31).

6. Students should read “Step Three” on their own to help them select a point of view.
7. Give students time to mull over their potential topic. Students who choose early can always turn in their homework early—and perhaps talk over their topics with any stymied or conflicted classmates. You may also need to meet individually with some kids to help them choose. As Gelb says, you shouldn’t choose for them... but you may be able to help them see a pattern or a passion in their raw material that they’ve missed.

**What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #2 (one per student)

students’ brainstorming exercises, passed back to them

**How Did It Go?**

Were students able to pick a topic? Were they able to choose all three factors that determine their point of view? Are they making choices that seem to be setting them up for success?

### Step Four: Getting it Down

In this lesson, students actually write the first draft of their essays.

This lesson is composed mainly of homework, split over several days. Minimal class time will be needed to clarify directions and check in with students.

After students complete this lesson, you may decide to take a break from the unit. A pause could allow students to approach their revisions with more energy and thoughtfulness.

#### **Common Core Standards Covered:**

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

#### **What To Do:**

1. Have students read Step Four for homework.
2. The next day in class, run a quick survey of the writing habits and issues Gelb mentions in this book. Begin with his paragraph on procrastination (p. 59). Read the paragraph out loud. If the statement describes a student's past or anticipated behavior, he or she should stand. This will give the class a nice visual that they're not alone in their struggles. Read a bit about each of the potential blocks Gelb discusses in this chapter (there are three more issues on pages 62 and 63). You might also wish to share your own experiences with students.
3. Pass out copies of Handout #3. Give students their due date for the rough draft. Clarify any questions about each part, then give them a few minutes of class time to complete Part A. It may be worthwhile to discuss what constitutes a valid reason to skip a day of writing. Students may end up deciding there are no valid reasons, in which case they should cross out this part of the handout.
4. Students will be completing the rest of the handout—as well as the actual rough draft—on their own. Checking in once or twice might help students clarify any questions they have regarding Part B of the handout. For instance: if students were supposed to write but didn't, they do need to record a zero word count for that day.
5. On the due date you've set, each student should turn in a rough draft as well as his or her completed copy of Handout #3.

#### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #3 (one per student)



### **How Did It Go?**

Did each student turn in a rough draft of at least 500 words? Did each student turn in a completed copy of Handout #3?

### Appendix: Real Student Essays

In order to demystify the task of rewriting, students will analyze how their peers have navigated the revision process. Working with two essays from the appendix will enable students to practice giving feedback in a low-stakes setting. They will observe the changes from draft to draft in the sample essays, using these observations to make generalizations about the revision process.

Please note: your students should be seated in small groups for this activity.

This lesson will take two days of class. The lesson includes one night of homework, plus optional extra credit.

#### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (RL. 11-12.3)** – Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered. How the characters are introduced and developed).

**Standard (RL. 11-12.5)** – Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end the story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

**Standard (SL. 11-12.1)** – Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

#### **What To Do:**

1. To open class, run a quick survey of your students. Ask how many of them have ever “revised” a paper merely by doing a quick run of a computer’s spell check and/or grammar check program. Ask how many of them have ever received rough draft comments back from their teacher and, in completing their final draft, just quickly addressed the teacher’s marks. Ask students to share a few of their insufficient editing stories with the class, or share a few of your own. Lead into a discussion about the importance of revising, editing, and polishing.
2. Explain that students will be reading through multiple drafts of student essays in the appendix. Make sure they know the purpose of the activity: to concretize the revision process and give them a blueprint for their own upcoming revisions.
3. Pass out copies of Handout #4. Also, quickly review Gelb’s four elements of a narrative (pgs. 13-18). Students will be identifying these four elements in the final draft of student essays.

4. As students follow along in their books, read aloud the introductory material to the appendix. Also read the introduction to Megan’s essay. Ask a student volunteer to read Megan’s early draft out loud.
5. Pause at this point. Ask the whole class to critique Megan’s essay together (and perhaps start by telling them that it’s 651 words). What are the issues with the essay? What intrigues you about the essay—what questions would you ask Megan to help direct her revision? As the whole class discusses, have someone take notes. Preferably, these notes would be on butcher paper (and then posted as a sample for students to consult later).
6. Now, read aloud Gelb’s commentary regarding Megan’s early draft. Offer feedback to the class—did they notice the same issues, or have similar suggestions?
7. Ask another student to read Megan’s next draft out loud while the rest of the class follows along. You will interject (reading Gelb’s commentary, which is both bolded and bracketed). This time, have students critique the draft in their peer groups. Also ask them to discuss: did they note the same issues as Gelb, or have similar suggestions? Ask three or four groups to share out after they’ve processed in groups. Then, read aloud Gelb’s commentary regarding Megan’s next draft.
8. Ask another student to read the final draft of Megan’s essay out loud while the rest of the class follows along. As a whole class, discuss what Megan did to improve her essay. List off any particular strengths of the essay. As the class conducts their discussion, have a student take notes. Preferably, these notes would be on butcher paper (and then posted as a sample for students to consult later).
9. Put your teacher copy of Handout #4 under the document camera. Guide students through identifying Gelb’s four elements of a narrative as they manifest in Megan’s essay. Everyone should be taking the same notes that you have on your handout.
10. Explain to students that tomorrow, they will be working in groups to break down another student’s set of essays. They will follow the same process you used today. As preparation, tonight’s homework will be to read the rest of the student essays in the appendix. They should be thinking about which student essay they’d like to analyze in their group.
11. To close out the class, pass out one piece of scrap paper to each student. Tell students these are exit slips; ask them to write down what assistance they will need from you tomorrow (if they know what they’re doing and don’t need any help, they should still write down “nothing”). Students need to write their names on their exit slips and hand those slips to you as they leave class.
12. To prepare for class the next day, make sure you have the butcher paper discussion notes posted where all students can see. These, combined with the notes students took on the four narrative elements of Megan’s essay, should serve as a guide for groups as they move forward with the day’s work.

13. Ask student groups to spend the first five minutes of class choosing which student's set of essays they want to analyze. (For purposes of this activity, they need to look at an early draft and a final draft—therefore, Hannah's essay will not work.) If necessary, you can spend this time checking in with individual students whose exit slips indicated confusion.

14. Remind students of their objective: to use the steps on Handout #4 to analyze a set of student essays from the appendix. As part of their process, each group should re-read the early and final drafts of the essay they're analyzing. Clarify that, although students are working in groups, each individual needs to fill out his or her own handout. Pass out extra copies of the handout as needed, and circulate to assist groups and/or individual students.

15. During the last few minutes of class, lead students through a reflection. Pass out another scrap piece of paper to each individual and ask them to respond in writing to the following question: "What have you learned or observed in the past two days? How will your learning/observations assist you as you move forward with your own essay revisions?" If time permits, have several students share their responses with the class. Students should turn in their completed handouts and exit slips as they leave class.

16. A potential extra credit assignment would involve students analyzing the remaining essays in the appendix. Extra credit due dates have not been added to either unit calendar in the supplementary material.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #4 (one per student, plus one for you and a few extras)

a document camera and projector

a writing utensil

scrap pieces of paper (two per student)

### **How Did It Go?**

Did you receive thoughtful responses on your exit slips? If not, were you able to follow up with the struggling individuals or groups? Were students able to identify Gelb's four elements of a narrative within the final essay draft they selected? Could they identify and analyze the changes between the sample students' drafts? Could students interact respectfully and productively in small groups?

## Steps Five and Six

In this lesson, students will tackle the “big picture” editing of their essay.

This lesson begins with homework, continues with one in-class day, and finishes after several nights of revision. Minimal class time will be needed to clarify directions. You may need to check in with individual students for extended writing conferences.

### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard (W. 11-12.3a)** – Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters: create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

**Standard (W. 11-12.3b)** – Use narrative technique, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**Standard (W. 11-12.3c)** – Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

**Standard (W. 11-12.3e)** – Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

**Standard (W. 11-12.4)** – produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standard (W. 11-12.5)** – Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

**Standard (W. 11-12.10)** – Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

### **What To Do:**

1. Prior to the lesson, have students read Steps Five and Six for homework. To encourage thoughtful reading, tell students to complete a “found word” poem for each chapter—taking the

most important words and phrases and arranging them into a poem (adding words and punctuation as necessary). If students complete the assignment successfully, they will have two poems, each one accurately summarizing the main ideas of each chapter. Here is a sample of a found word poem for the Step Five section on tone (pgs. 71-73):

Tone all wrong?  
impenetrable thicket  
brash, jokey lingo  
maudlin sobfest  
smarmy...  
*Relax!*  
Be honest, human.  
Connect with the reader.

2. At the start of class, have students share their found poems with one another. From these small groups or pairings, ask several students to share with the whole class. Offer complimentary feedback that highlights the important points of both chapters. Review key concepts from the chapters as necessary.

3. Pass out copies of Handout #5. Give students their due date for the second draft. Clarify any questions about each part of the drafting process, and then give them the remainder of class to get started.

4. Students will be completing the rest of the handout—as well as the actual second draft—on their own. You probably want to give them several nights to wrestle with their revisions. Checking in once or twice during class might help students clarify any questions they have regarding the process. If students are really struggling, you might pick a volunteer and spend one entire class day working through the brainstorming process with that student. If you choose to do this modeling activity, you will want to project the student's essay and handout using a document camera. This way, the whole class can follow along visually as well as verbally.

5. On the due date you've set for their homework, each student should turn in a second draft as well as his or her completed copy of Handout #5.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #5 (one per student—please note that this handout is double-sided)

students' rough draft essays, passed back to them

a document camera and projector (optional)

### **How Did It Go?**

Did each student turn in a second draft of at least 500 words? Did each student turn in a completed copy of Handout #5? Were you able to meet with and assist struggling individuals?

### Step Seven: Self-Editing

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to playfully examine style and revision. After “revising” passages from classic literature, students will then turn to their own essays.

The activity takes one class period and requires students to work in small groups. Afterwards, students will do homework.

#### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard (W. 11-12.3d)** –Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

**Standard (W. 11-12.4)** – produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standard (W. 11-12.5)** – Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

**Standard (W. 11-12.10)** – Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Standard (L. 11-12.3)** –Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

#### **What To Do:**

1. Have students read Step Seven for homework.
2. The next day in class, open with a brief journaling activity. Ask students to identify which of the issues from Step Seven they see most often in their own writing. Do they have issues with mixed metaphors? Tone? After they’ve had time to jot down a few thoughts, ask them to share with a partner. A few students may wish to share with the class as a whole.
3. Explain the homework. Students will need to re-read their second draft essays out loud. They will need to find and fix any issues with clichés, figurative language, tone, authenticity, or proportion and rhythm. Set a due date. On that due date, students should either (a) send an



electronic copy of their essay to you or (b) bring a printed copy of their newly improved second draft to class.

4. Tell students that you don't have any set formula for them to use as they evaluate and fix their own work. They should just consult Gelb's book and evaluate their own writing as honestly as possible. The final step will be to address any deficiencies through revision.

5. To make general issues of style more visible to students, you do have a creative classroom activity. In groups, they are going to take a passage from a familiar work of literature and "backwards draft" it. They've all read the final draft... you want them to rewrite a passage as an earlier, problematic draft. If your students have recently read *The Scarlet Letter*, for instance, they might write a mixed-metaphor description of Hester Prynne. They could add qualifiers to a description of the scarlet letter's power. Or perhaps they could rewrite some dialogue using excessively informal language. Make it a contest—offer a prize to the group who can cram the most (and most egregious) writing sins into their backwards draft.

6. Have students share their backwards drafts. The class should vote on which group deserves the prize for worst "revision." Ask students to complete either an informal verbal reflection or a formal written reflection on how this creative exercise increased their awareness of (a) writing style and (b) the power of revision. Ask how they can apply their increased awareness to revising their own essays.

7. On the due date for their homework revisions, have students reflect on their revision process thus far. How does it differ from how they normally revise an essay? What parts are they finding especially valuable? Are there any steps that seem particularly frustrating? Essays and reflections should be turned in—though please note that you are not going to be reading these essays. Students will be doing another revision right away. They're turning in the essay for assignment credit, which is why electronic submission might be such a good option at this point.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

pre-selected passages from classroom literature, formatted for student revision

### **How Did It Go?**

Were students able to "revise" the literary passages? Did they have fun creating and sharing their backwards drafts? Could students interact respectfully and productively in small groups? Could they make useful generalizations based on the activity and subsequent reflection? Did they all turn in an improved second draft? Could they reflect honestly and thoroughly on the revision process thus far?

### Step Eight: Third Draft

This lesson plan consists of a series of editing exercises, followed by one day of class work.

Chances are that at this point in the unit, you're running short on time. The lesson plan below has been written with that assumption in mind. However, the plan could be easily adapted if you have more time to devote to the unit. Each of the exercises listed on Handout #6 could be completed as an in-class warm-up activity.

#### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard (W. 11-12.3d)** –Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

**Standard (W. 11-12.4)** – produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standard (W. 11-12.5)** – Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

**Standard (W. 11-12.10)** – Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Standard (L. 11-12.3)** –Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

**Standard (L. 11-12.3a)** – Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's *Artful Sentences*) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

#### **What To Do:**

1. Students need the latest drafts of their essays. Also give a copy of Handout #6 to each student. Explain students' homework: they are to read Step Eight in *Conquering the College Admissions Essay* and, as they read, complete the activities listed on Handout #6. Set a due date for the homework. Clarify what students need to bring in on the due date: their marked-up copies of the second draft, as well as a clean copy of the third draft.

2. If you've given students more than one night to complete the homework, you might want to check in with the class. How's the assignment going? Do they have any questions for you? Clarify instructions and address issues as necessary.
3. On the due date you've set, students should bring two items to class: their marked-up copies of the second draft as well as a clean copy of the third draft (in which all issues they identified have been addressed and all changes have been integrated).
4. Put students in pairs and pass out Handout #7. Partners will look over one another's work—reading the second draft and then the third draft. Partners will complete the reflection half-sheet (Handout #7) on one another's essays. They will give the half-sheets and the essays back to the original writer, explaining their half-sheet comments to one another as necessary.
5. Have students take out their copies of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*. Direct their attention to the "Lost and Found" and "Vague Reference" section of Step Eight. Have them follow along as you read these sections out loud.
6. Have students find new partners. These new partners will exchange their third draft essays only. Students will read their partner's essay. As they read, they should bracket any "badly snarled" sentences. They should also label the bracketed sentence "AWK" for "awkward." If students encounter any vague references, they should circle the confusing pronoun and put a question mark above it. Partners will give the essays back to the original writer, explaining any of their editing marks as necessary.
7. For homework, students need to address any of the issues located by their partner in the previous step. They should also consult the chart on Handout #7. Was their first partner able to correctly identify the four elements of their narrative? If not, students may have some more serious revising to do.
8. The next day in class, students will turn in a packet of work containing: their reflection half-sheet (filled out by another student), their marked-up second draft, and a clean copy of their updated third draft.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #6 (one per student)

copies of Handout #7 (one per student—please note that this handout is actually a half-sheet)

students' second draft essays, passed back to them

### **How Did It Go?**

Did each student turn in a marked-up copy of their second draft? Did each student turn in a third draft of roughly 500 words? Were the two drafts bound together with the reflection half-sheet on top? Was there a noticeable difference between the second and third drafts?

### Step Nine, Part One: Feedback

In this lesson, students will seek feedback on their essays. They will spend one day in class completing the writing group process with one another. On their own time, they will also obtain feedback from at least two other sources.

#### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.5)** – Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

**Standard (W. 11-12.10)** – Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Standard (SL. 11-12.1)** – Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

#### **What To Do:**

1. At the start of class, have students silently read pages 134-139 of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*. This is the section regarding critical reviews.
2. Have students move to their writing groups. You will want to assign these groups in advance. Choose groups of three or four students. If possible, groups should consist of students who will work well together, but who are not best friends. (Lack of familiarity with their peers will make it easier to approach one another’s essays with fresh eyes.)
3. Explain the writing group process to students. If possible, keep the process guidelines posted somewhere in the room. That way, groups can consult the guidelines as necessary while working through the process.

Writing Group Process: The student writer brings enough copies of his or her essay so that everyone in the group (including the writer) will have a copy. The student writer reads his or her essay out loud. While he or she reads, the other group members make notes on their copies of the essay. Afterwards, the group gives verbal feedback to the student writer. All copies of the essay are returned to the student writer.

4. As students move through the writing group process, you can be circulating and monitoring their progress. If enough students seem confident and productive, this might be an excellent time to meet with struggling individuals.

5. Students will probably need the entire class period to complete their writing groups. After they are finished, introduce the second part of the activity. Pass out two copies of Handout #8 to each student. Explain that they need to solicit feedback from at least two other sources. One of those sources must be a teacher at the school (and no, it cannot be you). The other source should be someone they trust who has already graduated from high school. While parents or other adult relatives might be a good option here, they might also want to consider younger friends or family members currently attending college.

The student needs to explain the purpose and intended audience of their essay to each of their other evaluators. With that purpose and audience in mind, the evaluators should read and comment on the essay. Each evaluator should also give verbal feedback to the student.

Alternatively, if you are using a rubric to grade the final draft, it would be a good idea to provide that rubric to evaluators. (See supplementary materials for rubric suggestions.)

6. Students should follow Gelb's six guidelines regarding critical feedback (pgs. 136-138) as they receive criticism and incorporate it into their next set of revisions.

7. On the due date you've set, each student should turn in their latest draft of the essay, along with the feedback from their outside sources.

### **What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

each student will need several copies of his or her latest essay draft

### **How Did It Go?**

Could students interact respectfully and productively in small groups? Were students able to collect feedback from two additional sources? As necessary, were students able to differentiate between useful and unfounded feedback? Could they successfully revise their essays in response to useful feedback?

## Steps Nine and Ten

Most students are quite familiar with polishing—it's likely what they've been doing in lieu of editing or revising. Accordingly, this lesson is quite short and consists almost exclusively of homework.

### Common Core Standards Covered:

**Standard (W. 11-12.3)** – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard (W. 11-12.4)** – produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standard (W. 11-12.5)** – Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

**Standard (W. 11-12.10)** – Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Standard (L. 11-12.3)** –Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

**Standard (L. 11-12.1)** – Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Standard (L. 11-12.1a)** – Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of conversation, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

**Standard (L. 11-12.2)** – Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### What To Do:

1. Have students finish reading the book for homework.
2. The next day in class, pass out copies of Handout #8. Give students their due date for the final draft. Clarify any questions about instructions for the handout, which will guide them through their essay polishing.

3. Students should complete the rest of the handout—as we’ll as the actual final draft—on their own. As they complete each polishing task, their parent or guardian should sign off on it in the provided space.

4. On the due date you’ve set, each student should turn in a final draft of their essay as well as his or her completed copy of Handout #8. Ask students to complete a brief reflection on what they’ve learned about the writing process and/or their own identity as a writer throughout this unit. Students should also turn in the reflection.

5. This unit has been a huge undertaking for students; it might be more revision and editing than they’ve ever experienced before. It might be a good idea to pause and celebrate before moving on to your next unit.

**What You Need:**

a copy of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* for each student

copies of Handout #8 (one per student—please note that this handout is a half-sheet)

**How Did It Go?**

Did each student turn in a completed copy of Handout #8? Did each student turn in a final draft? Are the final drafts ready to be sent to college admissions counselors? Do the reflections indicate that students have developed as writers over the course of this unit?



Handout #1, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step One: Understanding the Narrative**

	explanation in my own words	example from class text _____	example from teacher's story
"The Once"			
"The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary"			
"Tension and Conflict"			
"The Point"			

Handout #2, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Choosing a Topic and Point of View**

	explanation in my own words
<b>Purpose</b>	
<b>Audience</b>	
<b>Topic</b> <i>Share the real you in limited space. Be sure to include <u>conflict!</u></i>	
<b>Point of View</b> <i>List tense, person, and number</i>	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step Four: Getting it Down

#### Part A: Planning

The rough draft is due on \_\_\_\_\_. You have \_\_\_\_\_ days between now and then to get it down. During that time span, you will have other obligations and responsibilities. Please make a quick list of the obligations and responsibilities you can already anticipate:

Are there any days that you won't be able to write at all? If so, explain.

Use the above information to set your daily word count quota: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part B: Process

Please record the date and word count accomplished for each day that you are supposed to write. Also include one to three words to recap your experience of that day. Finally, please make a note about any strategies you used to get going.

#### Part C: Reflection

Please answer the following questions as thoughtfully as possible. Use the back of this handout and/or additional paper as necessary.

- 1) Compare your writing plan (Part A) with your actual writing experience (Part B). Did you deviate from the plan, or follow it exactly? Explain.
- 2) Look at the words and phrases you used in Part B to recap your daily writing experience. Do you notice any sort of pattern or trend? Explain.
- 3) What have you learned about yourself as a writer during this initial drafting process?

Handout #4, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix: Real Student Essays**

(1) Read the initial draft of the essay and discuss it in your group. On the back of this sheet, list what suggestions you would make to your student writer as he/she prepares to revise.

(2) Read the final draft of the essay and discuss it in your group. On the back of this sheet, list what the student writer did to improve his/her essay. Also list any noticeable strengths of the essay. Be as specific as possible!

(3) Please fill out the chart below after you've read the final draft of the student's essay. Use your group as a resource!

	Megan's essay	_____ 's essay
"The Once"		
"The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary"		
"Tension and Conflict"		
"The Point"		

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Steps Five and Six**

	<b>Explain the potential problem (and the corresponding revision opportunity it represents)</b>	<b>Is this a problem in your own essay? If so, how will you fix it? If not, why not? (What did you do well in this area?)</b>
Concept	<i>Your basic idea doesn't work; you have to start over with a new idea.</i>	
Presentation		
Structure and Flow <i>(addressed in both chapters)</i>		
Tone		
Radical Surgery		

	<b>Explain the potential problem (and the corresponding revision opportunity it represents)</b>	<b>Is this a problem in your own essay? If so, how will you fix it? If not, why not? (What did you do well in this area?)</b>
Bad Beginnings		
Egregious Endings		
Playing with Time		

Writing the second draft involves digging deeper, figuring out what your piece is actually about. Often, this involves asking yourself the question Gelb asked Hannah: “Is there a moment in the entire span of this experience...that fills you with particularly intense feelings when you think about it?” (pgs. 91-92). After doing some serious thinking about your essay, fill out the following plan for the second draft:

“The Once”	“The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary”	“Tension and Conflict”	“The Point”
------------	--------------------------------------	------------------------	-------------

Now, using this handout as a guide, write your second draft of the essay.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step Eight: Third Draft

**Directions:** Start by reading the introduction for the chapter. Continue reading each section. As you finish each section, complete the editing activity listed under each header below. Please note that these activities assume that you already understand parts of speech. If you need a grammar refresher, check out [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#).

**Keep it Clean:** Highlight all of the exclamation points used in your essay. Unless it's serving a necessary function (see pg. 118), put a slash mark through each exclamation point. Replace the slashed punctuation in your third draft.

**Adverb Abuse:** Underline all of your adverbs. Again, put a slash mark through most (if not all) of them and delete the slashed words from your third draft.

**The Human Voice:** Bracket all of your dialogue (this is, of course, assuming you have some). Make sure you've followed proper paragraphing rules for that dialogue (new speaker, new paragraph, etc.) Is your dialogue short, punchy, and purposeful? If not, note in the margins how you plan to fix your dialogue and make the edits in your third draft.

**Don't Waste Time:** You can read the section right now, but you won't do the editing activity associated with it until the end of this assignment.

**Find Strong Verbs and Questions Your Adjectives:** Highlight all of your verbs—yes, all of them! Be sure to highlight auxiliary verbs as well. Then, circle all of your adjectives. Replace any weak or repetitive verbs. Hopefully in doing so, you can cross out most of your adjectives.

**Lost and Found and Vague Reference:** These will be done in class. For now, you can skip those sections of reading. Just move along with the remaining reading and activities.

**Put Some Pace On It:** Read your essay out loud. Label any sections that contain monotonous rhythm and/or a series of sentences that all start out the same way. Note in the margins how you will edit these sentences. Fix them in your third draft.

**Don't Quote Me On This:** Cross out any gratuitous quotes you pulled off the Internet. Delete them from your third draft.

**Don't Waste Time (the activity):** Make all of the changes you marked on your second draft. Now, print out a clean copy of your new draft. Reread it. Are all of the words essential? Have you communicated your message in the clearest, cleanest way possible? If not, do one more edit and one more print-out!

Handout #7, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Student Writer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Critique Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer Reflection: Revisions**

- (1) Read the marked-up copy of your partner's second draft.
- (2) Now, read your partner's third draft. On the back of this sheet, list what the student writer did to improve his/her essay. Also list any noticeable strengths of the essay. Be as specific as possible!
- (3) Please fill out the chart below after you've read the final draft of the student's essay. You are *not* allowed to ask the student for clarification—just use the information from the essay. (If necessary, review Gelb's four elements of a narrative on pgs. 13-18)

"The Once"	"The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary"	"Tension and Conflict"	"The Point"

Handout #7, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Student Writer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Critique Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer Reflection: Revisions**

- (1) Read the marked-up copy of your partner's second draft.
- (2) Now, read your partner's third draft. On the back of this sheet, list what the student writer did to improve his/her essay. Also list any noticeable strengths of the essay. Be as specific as possible!
- (3) Please fill out the chart below after you've read the final draft of the student's essay. You are *not* allowed to ask the student for clarification—just use the information from the essay. (If necessary, review Gelb's four elements of a narrative on pgs. 13-18)

"The Once"	"The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary"	"Tension and Conflict"	"The Point"



Handout #8, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Polish**

Polishing Task	Date completed, plus parent/guardian signature
<input type="checkbox"/> I checked my essay over for the common errors listed in “Step Nine: Pulling It Together.” I made changes as necessary.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I reread my essay to locate and remove any jargon.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I checked my language and made sure it was gender sensitive.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for spelling.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for punctuation.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for usage (making sure I didn’t accidentally write “on” instead of “of,” etc).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Optional: if polishing isn’t my strong suit, I also had a trusted editor look over my final draft for all of the issues listed above.</i>	

Handout #8, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

due date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Polish**

Polishing Task	Date completed, plus parent/guardian signature
<input type="checkbox"/> I checked my essay over for the common errors listed in “Step Nine: Pulling It Together.” I made changes as necessary.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I reread my essay to locate and remove any jargon.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I checked my language and made sure it was gender sensitive.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for spelling.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for punctuation.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I proof-read once through for usage (making sure I didn’t accidentally write “on” instead of “of,” etc).	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Optional: if polishing isn’t my strong suit, I also had a trusted editor look over my final draft for all of the issues listed above.</i>	

**Sample Unit Calendar #1: Full, Five-Week Unit**

This version of the unit is meant to be taught in tandem with other curriculum, and assumes that you've completed Lesson Plan #1 (the brainstorming exercises) at an earlier time. Students will have homework for this unit every night, but the darker-shaded portions of the calendar indicate days you should devote to separate content. The lightly shaded days indicate that you will spend fifteen minutes or less of class time on the college admissions essay unit.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lesson Plan #2	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #2</u></b> <b><u>HW</u></b>  Lesson Plan #2	Lesson Plan #3		
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #3</u></b> <b><u>HW</u></b> and <b><u>Lesson #4 HW,</u></b> <b><u>part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #4				
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #4</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 2</u></b>  Lesson Plan #5	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #5</u></b> <b><u>HW</u></b>  Lesson Plan #5	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #6</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #6		
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #6</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 2</u></b>	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #7</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #7			<b><u>DUE: Lesson #7</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 2</u></b>  Lesson Plan #8 (brief intro)
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #8</u></b> <b><u>HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #8	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #8</u></b> <b><u>HW, follow-up</u></b> <b><u>revisions</u></b>  Lesson Plan #9			<b><u>DUE: Lesson #9</u></b> <b><u>HW</u></b>  Lesson Plan #10 (brief intro)
<b><u>DUE: Lesson</u></b> <b><u>#10 HW</u></b>  End of unit celebration				

Supplementary Materials, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*

**Sample Unit Calendar #2: Abbreviated, Two-Week Unit**

You will still need to complete Lesson Plan #1 (the brainstorming exercises) prior to the start of the unit.

Teaching the abbreviated unit will require modification of several lesson plans. Suggested modifications follow the calendar.

Please note that this abbreviated version of the unit places *much* greater homework pressure on students.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lesson Plan #2	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #2 HW</u></b>  Lesson Plan #2	Lesson Plan #3	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #3 HW and Lesson #4 HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #4	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #4 HW, part 2</u></b>  Modified Lesson #5 (see note about HW, below)
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #6 HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #6	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #6 HW, part 2 and Lesson #7 HW, part 1</u></b>  Lesson Plan #7	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #7 HW, part 2</u></b>  Modified Lesson #8	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #8 HW</u></b>  Modified Lesson #9	<b><u>DUE: Lesson #9 HW</u></b>  Modified Lesson #10
<b><u>DUE: Lesson #10 HW</u></b>  End of unit celebration				

**Modifications to Lesson Plan #5** – Spend one day as a whole class analyzing Megan’s essay drafts (“What to Do,” Steps 1-11). Skip analyzing another essay, make it extra credit, or have students complete an analysis on their own for homework.

**Modifications to Lesson Plan #8** – After introducing the night’s homework, have students take out their copies of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*. They should follow along as you read aloud the “Lost and Found” and “Vague Reference” section of Step Eight. Have them follow along as you read these sections out loud. Then, break students into pairs to read one another’s essays. As they read, they should bracket any “badly snarled” sentences. They should also label the bracketed sentence “AWK” for “awkward.” If students encounter any vague

references, they should circle the confusing pronoun and put a question mark above it. Partners will give the essays back to the original writer, explaining any of their editing marks as necessary. Students have the rest of the class to get started on the other editing tasks outlined in Handout #6. Anything they don't finish is homework. The next day of class, students will bring in their marked-up copies of the second draft, as well as enough clean copies of the third draft to conduct writing groups.

**Modifications to Lesson Plan #9** – Complete the same in-class writing group activity. Students will no longer solicit feedback from two sources. Instead, they need to solicit feedback from one source (presumably, someone they live with). Feedback needs to be received, reviewed, and incorporated into a new draft during one night of homework.

**Modifications to Lesson Plan #10** – Have students complete their editing in class. Instead of having parents or guardians date and sign off on students' editing tasks, have partners sign off for one another.

## **Suggestions for Grading and Feedback**

### Grading vs. Feedback

In a perfect world, the tasks of grading work and providing feedback would be synonymous—and teachers would have plenty of time in which to accomplish both. In reality, however, grading often feels like a Sisyphean task—a clerical chore that rewards or punishes students’ efforts, but does little to impact their actual learning.

Fortunately, the college admissions essay is the most authentic piece of writing high school students will ever do. Presumably, they’re already motivated to write. You don’t need to dangle the possibility of an “A” in front of them. Conversely, there’s little value (and perhaps great harm) in slapping a “C” on someone’s final polished draft.

That said, your students—alongside parents and administrators—will probably expect a grade-based reward for all of the time and effort spent during this unit. Here are some tips for managing the grading pile:

- Skip grading some of the assignments.
- All of the unit assignments can be scored based on participation or completion.
- Alternatively, you could choose one aspect of each assignment to grade (e.g. students do all of Handout #1, but you only assess whether or not they can explain “The Once” in their own words. Or perhaps students write the entire second draft, but you only offer feedback and/or evaluation on their introductions).

Presumably, your purpose is to help students craft a winning personal statement. Your time is a limited resource. Consider carefully how, when, and why you want to read students’ essays.

- Realistically, how much time can you spend grading and/or offering feedback? How does that time translate—can you look at one essay draft per student? Two? Do you need to read the same draft for every student, or should you differentiate?
- Will you allot each student a certain amount of writing conference time, to use at their discretion?
- Would your students benefit from hearing about general trends? If so, you could read five to ten essays from each submission and give the whole class feedback on what you’ve noticed.

### Potential Rubrics

If you do decide to evaluate students’ essays at some point in the writing process, there are many excellent scoring guides on the Internet. In particular, 6+1 Trait rubrics can be used with little or no adaptation. [Education Northwest](#) has several rubrics linked on their webpage. [Writingfix.com](#) has a series of Post-It templates that may help with revision, response, and editing.

These rubrics can be used to assign grades, give feedback, or both.

### **Suggestions for Electronic Submissions**

Most of the lesson plans can easily be modified to allow for (or require) electronic essay submissions. For quality revision and feedback, however, students should still have to print out at least one paper copy of their essay.

There are myriad options for electronic essay submissions. Some programs, such as [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com), require a subscription fee. Google Docs is free and allows students to create, share, and collaborate on documents online. Another option would be for students to send you their work via email attachments.

If you do choose to allow or require electronic essay submissions, set strong guidelines for how students should label their documents and (if relevant) email subject headers. You don't want to waste your grading time identifying and organizing untitled electronic files.

### **Teaching the College Admissions Essay: Alternate Assignments**

You may have students in your class who insist (in some cases, quite rightly) that they don't need to write the college admissions essay. Perhaps they've already written their essay; perhaps they've already been accepted to their top-choice school. Still other students may have post-graduation plans that do not include a four-year university.

Appropriate alternate assignments will depend on each individual's circumstances. Here are several possibilities:

- Students insisting that they've completed their essay may still benefit from the revision activities laid forth in Lessons Five through Ten.
- As noted in Appendix 2 of *Conquering the College Admissions Essay*, the application process involves multiple writing pieces. Students can concentrate on writing, revising, and polishing the other components of their application.
- Students could apply the principles of Gelb's book to scholarship essays.
- Students could apply the principles of Gelb's book to a creative writing or personal memoir piece.
- Many schools now require seniors to complete a culminating project—and often, project work happens on students' own time. Students could create, revise, and polish the written component of their project during your admissions essay unit.