

How Can You Hit The Required Word Count?

The Common App stated word range (for the long essay) is **250-650** words.

The ApplyTexas stated word range (for the long essay) is **500-700** words.

500-600 words is what's generally recommended as ideal: if you can get your essay to just about one full single page of single-spaced text in 12-point font, that's a nice, clean look.

If Your Essay Is Too Short:

Return to Stage 4: Reshaping. In particular, consider Step 2 (Showing and Telling) and Step 3 (What's Missing?).

If you have a lot more “telling” than “showing” at this point, ask yourself: Where can I add in more sensory details? More dialogue? A whole additional anecdote?

If you have a lot more “showing” than “telling” at this point, ask yourself: Where could I provide more reflection or explanation? Is there context that might be missing for the reader for any of the people, places, events, or situations I'm talking about?

Here's an example from real student Faiza of fleshing out a sentence by providing more context and a new sentence of “telling”:

Original sentence: *I was born muslim, but as a little child, my family wasn't as religious and we would celebrate things such as Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas with the rest of the family.* ---> 32 words

Edit 1: *Along with the struggles of friendship, there was also religion. I was born muslim, but for the first four years of my life, my family wasn't as religious and we would celebrate things such as Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas with the rest of the family.*
---> 46 words (14 words added to original)

Edit 2: *Along with the struggles of friendship, religion played a big part in my upbringing. I was born muslim, but for the first four years of my life, my family wasn't as religious and we would celebrate holidays such as Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas with our non-muslim relatives.* ---> 48 words (16 words added to original)

If Your Essay Is Too Long:

Do not hack it madly to pieces! If you're 100 or so words over the limit, there are lots of opportunities to shave off a word or two here and there without just deleting whole sentences or paragraphs, which might really disrupt the balance and flow of your essay, or cut out essential pieces of your story and create gaps in the narrative.

Instead, first go sentence by sentence and ask yourself:

1. Are there any **redundancies** -- i.e., do I say the same thing twice using different words?
2. Are there **extra words** that add nothing to the meaning that I can eliminate, or **more concise** ways to express the same idea? For example:
“all at once” -> “suddenly”
“at the same time” -> “simultaneously”
3. Do I give **multiple examples** to illustrate the same idea? Could I eliminate one or more of those examples?
4. In my “showing” sections: Are there **details or dialogue** here or there that I could eliminate or express more concisely while still creating a strong picture in the reader’s mind?
5. In my “telling” sections: Is there any **context** I’m providing that’s unnecessary for my reader to understand my story? Is there a phrase I could replace with a word? For example:

“the debate tournament, which took place every year in the capital city and drew competitors from all over the state” ---> 20 words

can easily be shortened to

“the statewide annual debate tournament” ---> 5 words (15 words eliminated).

- “Which took place every year” is replaced by “annual,” a single word with the same meaning.
- “Drew competitors from all over the state” is replaced by “statewide,” a single word with the same meaning.
- “In the capital city” is eliminated altogether, since in this case the main thing the writer wants the reader to understand is that the debate tournament is high-stakes, and the location of the tournament doesn’t really matter in this case.

You might have to comb back through your essay multiple times to find new ways to shave off a word or two here or there -- that’s okay. Here are a couple examples from real students going through the same sentence or excerpt over three rounds of editing to get their word count down, shaving off a few extra words each time:

Maria:

Original: *This organization creates projects and within the community we come together and talk about the current issues going on in the US and what we can do as a community to support each other. ---> 34 words.*

Edit 1: *NDSG comes together to create projects about current issues affecting our community. In order to take action and what can we do to support each other. ---> 26 words (8 words eliminated from original)*

Edit 2: *NDSG we work together to create projects in order to take action within the community to solve issues affecting marginalized groups. ---> 21 words (13 words eliminated from original)*

Edit 3: *NDSG works to promote equality in marginalized communities based on community projects. ---> 12 words (22 words eliminated from original)*

Gabriel:

Original: *Sitting in that room, my eyes read over the first two questions, but neither interested me. The third was something that piqued my interest slightly, but not enough for a speech. At last, I came to my fifth and final topic, "Reading and writing." ---> 44 words*

Edit 1: *Sitting in that room, I read two questions, but neither were interesting. The third was something that piqued my interest slightly, but not enough for a speech. At last, I came to my fifth and final question, "Reading and writing." ---> 40 words (4 words eliminated from original)*

Edit 2: *Sitting in that room, I read over two topics, but neither were interesting. The third was a little interesting, but not enough for a speech. At last, I came to my fifth and final question, "Reading and writing." ---> 38 words (6 words eliminated from original)*

Edit 3: *Sitting in that room, I read over two topics, but neither interested me. The third was a little interesting, but not enough for a speech. I came to my fifth topic, "Reading and writing." ---> ---> 34 words (10 words eliminated from original)*