

Stage 5: Final Draft

Stage 5 of the college essay writing process is **refining Draft 2** in order to produce the **final draft!**

In Stage 4, you focused on a macro-level, big-picture review of your essay, with the purpose of **reshaping** structure, organization, and content in your first draft. Your story has taken form and come to life, and all of its contours are visible.

If possible, wait **at least one day** after you've completed Draft 2 to begin Stage 5! (If you're under a big time crunch, take at least an hour -- it's really important to step back and disengage from your writing before returning to it. Otherwise, you are immersed too deeply to see it as clearly as you could.)

In Stage 5, you will focus on a micro-level, line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph review of your essay, with the purpose of **refining** the smaller elements of your story. That review will involve two rounds:

Round 1:

1. A line-by-line analysis to check & make any necessary changes to:
 - a. Word choice
 - b. Images
 - c. Sentence fragments/run-ons
 - d. Punctuation
 - e. Spelling and word use
2. A paragraph-by-paragraph analysis to check & make any necessary changes to:
 - a. Flow and readability
 - b. Sentence length and variety
 - c. Missing information and logic of ideas
 - d. Tone

Round 2:

Final read-through, with options to perform one additional solo check and/or present your essay to an additional (new!) reading partner.

If you are able to, **working with a reading partner is really highly recommended** at this stage! Here is why:

- Another person can see little errors in your writing that you can't.
- Even if there's nothing "wrong" with a particular sentence in terms of grammar or mechanics, what might be perfectly clear to you may be confusing to someone else.
- In terms of style, you may not be aware of the tone your writing is communicating until someone else responds to it.

Your reading partner does **not** have to be an "authority" or "expert" like a teacher or college counselor (although if you like and trust a certain teacher or counselor, absolutely ask for their help!). It can be a relative, a friend, a sibling -- whoever.

If you are working fully independently, however, just pretend you are a stranger who has never met you, reading this writing for the very first time. Make extra sure to take a good amount of time between finishing Draft 2 and initiating Stage 5 "micro" review in that case.

Notes on Working with a Reading Partner

To repeat some points from Stage 4: if you're working with a partner, this should be a **conversation**. Your reader, in their sweet eagerness to be of service to you, may get carried away and launch into a long list of all the things they feel need to be "fixed" about your essay and all the ideas they have for how it could be better. Stop them.

This process should be focused on you and what you are hoping to communicate-- not what someone else thinks you should be communicating, or how they would do it differently. Your reader is there to ask questions and point out things that are working well, things that are confusing, and straightforward errors. They are NOT there to take over your story. Don't be afraid to open the conversation by letting your reader know exactly what you do and do not want help with. For example: "I would really like feedback on grammar and punctuation. I'd also like to know if there's anything that's confusing or not well explained. But I feel really good about the structure and the story I've chosen, so I don't need you to focus on that at all."

On the other hand: it also doesn't work if you are not open to feedback. If you find yourself resisting everything your reading partner is saying or getting defensive about your choices, take a minute to breathe and collect yourself. See if you can re-enter the conversation with more openness. Don't be afraid to ask your reader politely to adjust their approach. For example: "Instead of telling me what to do, could you please ask questions about what I'm trying to get across and let me think it through myself?"

If you're trying, but just don't feel comfortable or like their feedback is useful to you, this might not be a good partnership. That is okay. Just thank your reader for their feedback, and seek another person to look at your essay.

Ultimately, trust yourself. You get to decide what feedback is useful and valid and what isn't. Listening with openness to a reader's suggestions is not the same as automatically accepting what they tell you to do against your own better judgment. This is your story -- no one else's.

What Others Are Saying About Stage 5

I really like how detailed the steps are. Sometimes at this stage, I find myself at a loss for what to do. A lot of the time there isn't really a concrete list for final edits, but this stage does that without feeling like a checklist!

Each round feels so intensive and brings something new and different to the drafting process.