

## Stage 4: Reshaping To Draft 2

Stage 4 of the college essay writing process is **reshaping Draft 1 into Draft 2**.

In Stage 3, you carved out your essay's basic shape -- like taking an electric chainsaw to a block of ice -- to make it begin to come alive. If possible, wait at least one day after you've completed Draft 1 to begin Stage 4! Let yourself and your story breathe before returning to it.

In Stage 4, you will perform a step-by-step review of your first draft in order to:

1. Identify all of the things that you like about your essay so far
2. Analyze your essay to determine the balance between **showing** and **telling** that exists so far in your narrative
3. Ask yourself four essential questions to analyze what might be missing from, or potentially confusing about, your narrative
4. Make a concrete plan for the changes you will make in Draft 2
5. Implement those changes and create Draft 2!

At this stage, the focus of your review and revision is on major, MACRO-level elements of your story: **structure and organization**.

The focus is also on **affirmation**: determining all the things about your story and your writing that are working before you start to think through what changes you'd like to make.

You can complete this stage completely independently, conducting a review of your own essay by yourself, or you can invite a reading partner to conduct a review alongside yours, so that you can get another person's perspective and feedback.

Often, a lifetime of getting papers back that are covered with red pen mark-ups highlighting every tiny error has conditioned us to approach our own writing with an extremely negative, critique-oriented mindset. Instead of looking for everything that is "right" about a piece of writing, we immediately begin looking for everything that is "wrong" about it. We take an imaginary red pen to our writing and rip it to shreds, sometimes concluding that the only thing to do is to start over, maybe even with a completely different topic.

Please return to the metaphor of writing as ice sculpture introduced in Stage 3. As explained in this video (["How A Master Ice Sculptor Makes Ice Come Alive" on Youtube](#)), making and manipulating ice for sculpting is an incredibly labor-intensive, costly process.

The ice sculptor, in the process of carving, does not look at their work-in-progress and despair at everything it has not yet become. They do not take a hammer and shatter their sculpture after the first round of shaping. They cannot afford to; the ice is too precious to mistreat in this way. Instead, they continue to work, lovingly, to reshape and refine their sculpture.

Therefore, we will not attempt to go from “basic shape” to “ultra-polished” in one step. It is not advisable to attempt to “fix” absolutely everything you think is “wrong” with your essay at once. Besides being discouraging and overwhelming, it’s just not an effective way to revise -- this has been proven over and over.

Instead, we will approach our writing with the love and care it deserves, because our stories are too precious to blast apart with criticism, whether it comes from ourselves or others. This process of continuing to carve our stories occurs over two stages of review:

1. **Reshaping:** Macro-level, primary review of Draft 1, for the purpose of revising it into Draft 2 (this is Stage 4)
2. **Refining:** Micro-level, secondary review of Draft 2, for the purpose of revising it into the Final Draft (this will occur in Stage 5)

Here’s the difference:

## **Macro Level, Primary Review**

### **Purpose:**

**Reshape:** Continue shaping the contours of your story to make sure all the elements are there

### **Elements to focus on:**

- **Structure and organization** (how you’ve chosen to begin and end; how you’ve split up information into paragraphs)
- **Showing and telling** (the balance between immersive storytelling and explanation of context & significance)
- **Content** (the narrative events, details, and reflections themselves)

## Micro Level, Secondary Review

### Purpose:

**Refine:** Refine the details and tone of your essay and comply with specifications

### Elements to focus on:

- **Style and tone** (word choice, sentence length, transitions -- does it sound like you?)
- **Mechanics** (grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax)
- **Parameters** (compliance with prompt, word count, & other requirements)

Note -- none of this is as rigid or binary as it may appear. If you find yourself naturally playing with style or automatically correcting mechanical errors as you work on Draft 2, of course you should not stop yourself from doing so! This is just to make the process more focused and more methodical, so that it does not feel so overwhelming.

Most importantly, try to handle your writing (and that of others!) with respect, reverence, and love. To find examples for this exercise, visit [www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing\\_samples.html](http://www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html)

### Before We Start: A Note on Working with a Reader

You can do the four steps of this review process completely independently on your own, or you can work with a reading partner -- a classmate, friend, teacher, tutor, parent or other “third party” reviewer who will read your essay and give you feedback.

The four main steps are the same, and you will complete all four steps whether you work with a reader or not. That is, working with a reader doesn’t mean “outsourcing” part of the review to someone else or dividing up the tasks -- your own assessment of your writing is centrally important.

Having a reader is wonderful, though, to get another perspective on your writing. It can be hard when you’re writing about your own life to catch what clarifying explanations about the who, what, where, when, why and how of a certain event are missing (or, on the other hand, if you’re over-explaining something you don’t need to!). It can be hard to know if you’ve provided enough sensory details for a scene to really come alive, when it’s so vivid in your own memory. And it can be hard to be sure that the voice you hear in your head as

you're writing is the voice a reader is hearing as they read. A reading partner can help you assess these things.

Therefore, if you are working with a reader, make sure they read this whole document and that both of you understand their role :

### **The Reader Is Not Here To:**

- Mark up “errors”
- Tell you things they think you should “fix”
- Make a definitive judgment about whether you chose the “right” story to tell or the “right” essay structure

### **The Reader Is Here To:**

- Affirm what they think is working really well in your essay
- Have a conversation with you about your writing
- Ask questions about things they're not sure about
- Let you take the lead

### **What Others Are Saying About Stage 4**

*Seeing how everything structures together and starts to be more than an essay is wonderful.*

*I like how this stage encourages reflection and writing out what you liked about the essay! I'd never really considered doing that before, but it really helped me. Also really loved the self-check questions.*

*One of the things I liked the most is the dos and don'ts for readers. I worked with a counselor on some of my college essays last year and it was a pretty terrible experience. The feedback wasn't bad, necessarily, but a lot of the suggested “edits” were things I'd added specifically or things that clouded the message of the story in general. It was a pretty frustrating experience for me.*

*The overall process was very straightforward, and was doable without a second person. I enjoyed the checklists about things we liked, didn't like, and what to work on. It made me feel that this is just as an important part of the draft as thinking of ideas.*