

A WRITING REVIEW: YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY

Please look over your paper and check the following:

☐ Introduction

Look at the introduction. Our mentor introductions used stories, scenes, and surprising facts to capture the reader's interest. How does yours compare to those? Do you use similar techniques or something else? Whatever you used, explain your approach and/or technique next to the first line. Then, once you've labeled your approach and/or technique, think about whether your intro feels as strong as the models. If it doesn't, try to improve it to make it stronger.

☐ Linking Verbs

Do a quick count of how many conjugations of *to be* you have on your first page. If you have more than five or six, look to eliminate some. If you have fewer than five or six, think about if there are any that need to be eliminated (remember, having some is fine; it's when you have too many that *to be* begins to be a problem).

☐ Sentence Length and Parallel Structure

Do a look for sentence length. Do you vary it? Is it used purposefully? Is there thoughtful parallel structure?

☐ Characterization

Look at how you explain who you are. Make a list in your notebook of the direct things you say about yourself and the indirect things you show. In looking at that list, is there any way to indirectly show some of the things you directly say? Generally speaking, showing is stronger than telling, so try to convert as many of the direct ones into indirect ones as you can.

☐ Clichés

Go on a cliché hunt. Highlight all potential college essay clichés (like, "I'm passionate about helping others, which is why I want to be a doctor") and replace

as many as possible with personal stories and details (such as, "I have a cousin who spent the majority of his childhood in the hospital. I spent many long nights watching his doctors work . . .").

☐ Everything Else

After everything above, read it again (or more than once) for other key things. In doing this, think about other elements we've talked about and where you've struggled with previous papers.

FIGURE 5.9 • An Example of a Targeted Checklist