

# Tips for Revising Personal Statements

Here are two bits of advice about revision and developing an audience of other helpful readers.

## Key Revision Topics

1. **Egocentrism:** How many “I”s does the draft contain, especially at the beginnings of sentences, and especially at the beginnings of consecutive sentences? Find every first person singular nominative pronoun and consider eliminating some of them.

2. **The Lead:** Is the first sentence going to make the audience WANT to read the next sentence? Can the draft be restructured to lead with the climactic moment in the narrative, producing an *in medias res* pattern?

3. **Verbs:** Find and check and strengthen every verb, especially in the lead sentence. Look for the usual suspects (“to be,” “to have” as a main verb, “to get,” “to seem,” “to show,” and verbs that name senses (“I smelled...”; “I heard...”; etc). Also, consider recasting a past-tense draft in the present tense, which tends to be more compelling.

4. **Multisensory imagery:** Remember that the audience is comprised of animals. To how many senses does the imagery in the draft appeal?

5. **Adjectives and Adverbs:** Compelling writing rides on verbs and nouns. Find every modifier and remove them where possible by strengthening nouns and verbs. Don’t write “I run quickly” where “I race,” “I sprint,” “I dash,” “I bolt” or any stronger verb will produce a more powerful description.

6. **Figurative Language:** Aristotle insists that mastery of metaphor is a sign of genius, but employ figurative language judiciously. Does the draft contain any examples of simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole or other tropes? One great simile can elevate your tale.

7. **Transitions:** Check transitions in time and space, but also from paragraph to paragraph, for clarity.

8. **Post-revision:** Proofread like you have never proofread before.

## Revision Strategies

Because the draft is so brief, I suggest a two-step approach to revision:

1. **Identification:** Don’t try to revise the draft for all of the topics at once. Instead, work through the draft looking for the revision topics one at a time, marking the draft for each of the elements as they occur.

2. **Adjustment:** Begin to make changes from start to finish.