**Editing Personal Statements for Style**

Style allows you to manage the effect your writing has on the people who read it. You want your words to feel forceful, and you want the way you write to convey a positive impression of you, the writer. (Rhetoricians call this your *ethos.*) The content is the most important part of your statement, as your character and experience are the most compelling indicators of your promise as a professional in your chosen field. But your style can help you manage how the reviewers of your application experience that content. While far from comprehensive, the list below offers some strategies for making your writing feel clear, lively, and forceful.

1. **Use verbs to express the action in a sentence**. Gerunds and suffixes like *-ment*, *-tion*, and *-ence* turn verbs into nouns (called nominalizations). Though you won’t be able to eliminate all nominalizations in your sentences, your writing will be clearer, livelier, and more concise if these concepts are expressed as actions rather than things. This is especially true in sentences where nominalizations are the subjects of verbs.

*As you edit*: Circle of the nominalizations in your paper (note that not all *-ing* words are gerunds). Work through them one at a time, checking to see if your sentence can be revised to feature the verb form of the nominalization.

1. **Replace forms of *to be* with more active verbs**. Action makes prose feel lively, and verbs are the site of action in a sentence. Because some things just *are*, you won’t be able to replace every form of *to be*, but in sentences that aren’t making a claim about how something *is*, strive to convey the action with a strong verb.

*As you edit*: Circle all forms of *to be* in your paper (*is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *be*, *been*, *being*), and see if you can replace each with an active verb.

1. **Limit your use of adjectives and adverbs**. Writing tends to feel more vivid when it uses actions and details (verbs and nouns) to convey information instead of description (adjectives and adverbs). Be especially suspicious of adjectives and adverbs whose primary use is to intensify the thing they’re describing (e.g. devastating loss, ran quickly). A powerful adjective or adverb typically generates some tension with the word it modifies. Compare “killing me softly” with “killing me fiercely.”

*As you edit*: Circle of the adjectives and adverbs in your essay. Delete the ones that are doing the least work; revise others to make your description more surprising or imagistic.

1. **Be concise**. Expressing the same information in fewer words can often make your writing feel more forceful.

*As you edit*: Work through each paragraph and sentence, asking yourself: “If I deleted this, what would be lost?” More specific concision strategies include:

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing. (*kind of, really, actually* . . .)
2. Delete words the repeat the meaning of other words. (*true and accurate, each and every, first and foremost* . . .)
3. Delete words implied by other words. (*terrible tragedy, final outcome, period of time, accurate manner* . . .)
4. Replace a phrase with a word. (*in the event that/if, are in a position to/can, an increase in the number of/more* . . .)
5. Change negatives to affirmatives. (*not different/similar, not often/rarely, not allow/prevent* . . .)
6. Delete useless adjectives and adverbs. (*very, absolutely, interesting . .* *.*)
7. Replace words with punctuation. (*“for example,” “that is,” “therefore” &c. can be replaced with a colon; a semicolon can replace “and” between two independent clauses*)
8. **Proofread!** You are a hard worker and a careful scholar who pays attention to detail. Your writing should reflect this. While not fatal to your application, typos can make you come across as sloppy or less invested in the application than you really are.

*As you edit*: Read your statement aloud. Perform it slowly, enunciating every word. This intense focus on the written text can help you catch typos and awkward phrasings.