

Principle I: The resume and essay should complement one another.

As a reader reviews your resume, he or she will formulate a number of possible images of and questions about you. Your job is to use the application essay to create a unified and compelling story. Your story will shape how the reader interprets your resume.

The resume's and essay's formats determine their key functions.

- Use the resume to establish focus and convey breadth of experience.
- Use the essay to motivate your focus (Why do you want to be a marine biologist? Why do you care about helping children?). Through motivation, readers begin to see passion, purpose, and individual character.
- Use the essay to convey the unique story behind your resume, and to add depth. Details, events, anecdotes, examples—all these conveyed through precise and concise language help the reader envision you.

Finding focus: Tutoring strategies that help the writer use the resume to find the essay's focus and story:

- Ask the tutee to circle items on the resume that are most interesting to the writer.
- Ask the tutee to underline items on the resume that would most intrigue application reviewers.
- Ask the writer about items that are circled and underlined: Can you tell me about this experience? Why was it interesting? Can you tell me about a particularly memorable event or moment during this experience? What did you learn from this experience? How has it shaped your goals? How does this experience relate to your interest in applying for this position (graduate school, fellowship, etc.)?
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Finding motivation: Tutoring strategies that help the writer discover and articulate those things that motivate him or her to apply for a particular opportunity:

- Next to each paragraph or next to each focus, ask the writer to jot down the following: 1) what the text is about, 2) what image does the text convey about the writer, 3) how the text adds to the writer's story. Both the tutor and tutee can do this independently and then compare their findings. The tutor and tutee can next discuss how well the draft conveys the hoped-for image and contributes to the writer's unique story. Ideas for revision (what might I delete, change, add?) should follow naturally.
- Ask "why" questions: Why do you want to be a marine biologist? Why do you care about helping children?
- Ask if there are any events or experiences that motivated the decision to apply for the position (graduate school, fellowship, etc.)
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Creating a unique picture of the person: Tutoring strategies that help the writer convey who he/she is:

- Ask for examples, anecdotes.
- Ask the writer to brainstorm a list of modifiers that characterize him/her. Then ask questions that help refine the picture the essay will create: Which of these modifiers is most important to you? Which is most important to your reader? Which would help

you create the picture you want to portray in this essay?

- Circle generic words (particularly noun and verb phrases) and ask the writer to tell you more about these (ask “I wonder what this means to you” questions). Brainstorm alternate words/phrases with the goal of creating a more precise description. Substitute in more precise words/phrases.
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Principle II: The writer and reader will never understand the essay in the same way.

Suggestions that the tutor might share with the tutee:

Throughout the writing process, test your essay out on different readers, and remember, “The reader is always right; the writer is always right” (Elbow and Belanoff 62).

- a. Begin the writing process by discovering your story. (Getting started and getting started early can be the hardest part. To make it easier, visit a writing center consultant or fellow to work through this brainstorming part of the process.)
- b. Draft your essay with development in mind—it is VERY easy to cut any draft by at least 50%.
- c. Identify five readers who might represent five committee members reviewing your application. (To identify these readers, research the relevant institution and talk with faculty, advisers, or any others who might be familiar with the committee make-up.) Select readers with purpose and audience in mind, as this student does:

“I’m trying to apply for Take Five now and I’m giving it [the application] to every person that I know . . . that can give a different point of view. . . . When I’m first starting out I give it [my writing] to my friends, and then in the middle stage I give it to my professors, and then at the end I give it to the people who I really think have done this before, you know, I’ve given them my papers before, because they pick up on the last minute things that people are looking for, you know clarity, and everything follows through. Is it easy to read through? Does it make sense?”

This student does not view all readers as equal: He chooses his reader according to his essay’s degree of development and the reader’s knowledge (Rossen-Knill and Bakhmetyeva 118).

- d. Now test out drafts on your different readers. Remember, “The reader is always right.” No matter what the reader says, find a way to address it while staying true to your message.

Principle III. When writers meet readers’ expectations, they increase their ability to communicate their intended meanings.

Strategies that will help the writer evaluate the readability of final drafts:

Readers may respond positively or negatively to any aspect of the essay—so don’t overlook the importance of creating a positive reading experience at the sentence level. Here are a few tips for creating a fluent sentence-to-sentence reading experience.

READER EXPECTATION: GIVEN-NEW	EXAMPLE
<p>Readers expect Given information before New information.</p> <p>←“Given” refers to information that has already been established—typically in the preceding text.</p> <p>→“New” refers to information that has not been established in the text.</p>	<p>New material is in bold-face; given material is <u>underlined</u>.</p> <p>A cluster is a set of related courses that fall within one of the three academic divisions. <u>Each cluster contains a minimum of 12 credits of coursework. Many clusters were created by students. They're just one more way you can customize your college education.</u> (http://enrollment.rochester.edu/admissions/learning/)</p>

READER EXPECTATION: END-FOCUS	EXAMPLES
<p>The end-focus expectation: readers expect to receive the most important information at the end of a sentence.</p>	<p>a. <i>The concert featured a world-class drummer and saxophonist from New Orleans.</i></p> <p>b. <i>The concert featured a saxophonist from New Orleans and a world-class drummer.</i></p> <p>(a) sends the message that the saxophonist is more important than the drummer. (b) sends the message that the drummer is more important.</p>
<p>Readers unconsciously feel the effects of end-focus.</p>	<p>Which would you like said about you:</p> <p>Her essay was interesting, but too long. Her essay was too long, but interesting.</p>

BONUS TIP: Given-New and End-Focus also apply at the essay level.

Finally, visit a writing consultant or fellow during any (and all) stages of the writing process. I write all the time, and I can't imagine having to write without ongoing critical feedback from experienced writers and readers (see <http://writing.rochester.edu/help/index.html>).

Works Cited

- Elbow, Peter, and Pat Belanoff. *Sharing and Responding*. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Rossen-Knill, Deborah, and Tanya Bakhmetyeva. *Including Students in Academic Conversations: Principles and Strategies for Teaching Theme-Based Writing Courses across the Disciplines*. New York: Hampton, in press.

Starting an application session

- Establish that you are ONE READER with ONE OPINION. You are not evaluating their application.
- Gauge what kind of feedback the student is looking for and whether they are ready to hear critical feedback.
- Empathy could go a long way: acknowledge that this type of writing is challenging and that it is difficult to write about yourself; discuss how the genre of the personal statement has different demands than the academic writing we are used to doing.
- Encourage them to get feedback from other readers, especially their advisor and professors in the relevant field(s).

Brainstorming: If the student doesn't know what to write about or doesn't feel they are unique/interesting, you may use the following questions to begin brainstorming in the session:

- By using the specific questions listed below, you will be able to guide the student towards identifying some of the most important aspects of a personal statement:
 - What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
 - What details of your life might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
 - When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field?
 - How have you learned about this field?
 - What are your career goals?
 - Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?
 - Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life?
 - What personal characteristics do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession?
 - Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
 - What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

Essays that are Based on Clichés: i.e. "I want to go to med school to help people."

- Say something like "that's a great place to start but I would expect that admissions committees will see many essays by applicants who want to help people; let's work on making that more specific and unique to you"
- Tutor becomes interviewer, asking questions to help the tutee develop and specificity and move beyond the generic cliché
 - Why do you want to help people?
 - What past experiences inspired you to want to help in this way?
 - Who do you want to help?
 - Who inspired you to want to help?
 - When did you discover this goal?
 - How do you think med school will help you achieve this goal?

Controversial Idea or Opinion: i.e. "I deserve to go to Harvard because my father did" or "I was arrested for drug possession and use--it turned my life around"

- If the application is offensive to the tutor, be sure to keep your opinion and personal reaction out of your discussion as a student!
- Instead, take a step back and occupy the role of the interviewer, pushing the student toward a deeper meaning. See interview questions above.
- Bring back to audience: talk about who might be on the admissions committee; ask the student how they think each committee member will receive and interpret this aspect of the essay? Have a discussion emphasizing how each reader will have different views and may not share student's perspective.

Transfer Applications-tricky dynamics;

Remember not to take someone transferring personally; these students are still UR students and deserve to hear our perspective as trained readers and tutors; remember that every individual has a different college experience and different expectations for themselves and from their families; try to treat the fact that they are transferring objectively and respect their opinions of and experiences at UR.

- If they seem to be overly negative or critical about UR, try to discuss in terms of the tone of the essay and how their audience will interpret and respond; if the essay has an overly negative tone, try to steer them towards what specific experiences they've had that have prepared them for the transfer institution or what is particularly appealing about that school

Conforming to length requirements or guidelines: strategies for cutting and condensing

- highlighting important ideas, details, content, favorite sentences
- Looking for fluff; unnecessary clauses; extraneous content and information
- Look for an overall narrative and cohesive story--not all information from your resume belongs in a personal statement!

If tutee is looking for evaluation i.e. "is this a good personal statement?"

- Jill Fadule, Director of Admissions at Harvard Business School, tells students to assess the quality of their personal statement in the following manner: "Is this a true picture of me? If someone had never known me before, would they really know me after reading (this) essay?" (Stelzer,68)
- Strategy: tutor and tutee both write down what they "get" (tutor) or hope readers to get (tutee) from the text and compare
- Tell the student what questions you had, or what you wanted to hear more about as a reader
- Share what you learned about the student from this essay

CWP Application Workshop

Handout Developed by Hayley Brower, Hilary Wermers, and Stefanie Sydelnik

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Application Session Scenarios

Situation #1: Transfer Application Brainstorm

A student comes in asking for help brainstorming a transfer essay. As you begin to question them about their reasons for going elsewhere, it becomes apparent that they are looking for programs that UR already has (a business major or Greek life, for example). How can we keep our own personal biases out of this session? Is it the tutor's place to guide the student towards the positives of UR?

Situation #2: Highly Personal Statement of Purpose

A student comes into the writing center and seems very nervous to show you their piece of writing. You discover it is a statement of purpose for graduate school and contains some very sensitive information. After reading the piece silently, you are unsure how to proceed; critiquing or probing into such sensitive material seems wrong. How can you help the student feel comfortable and help them improve the piece?

Situation #3: Forced Transfer

A student comes in with a transfer application essay that seems highly negative. They are unenthusiastic about it. Probing them further, you discover they are transferring because their parents have decided they need to be closer to home (alternately, the student could have a health issue and need to be close to home, or could be applying to graduate school they are not actually interested in to appease their family). How can we help this student transfer successfully when it is not necessarily their first choice?

Sample Application

I have always been interested in stories of scientists fighting to understand disease, but it was not until my grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer three years ago that I realized how unfair and frightening illness can be. She has chosen to smoke for as long as I have been alive, and I had always known that her choice could have serious consequences for her. While she was undergoing treatment she gave me a book about the early years of the HIV epidemic. I devoured it, and, as a lifelong book worm, I soon found myself leaving my school's library weekly with stacks of similar ones. I came to realize that my grandmother was in a unique position- she knew why she had gotten sick and the steps she could take to make herself healthier. My personal interest in finding ways to help people make informed choices when faced with cancer has led me to pursue a career in epidemiology.

My previous research has focused on modeling biological phenomena. Among other projects, in 2009 I worked in an NSF-funded research program at Virginia Tech modeling the spread of the influenza virus in schools, based on data gathered from a local high school. The results of this research were incorporated into the larger model of the US created by the Bioinformatics department to model disease spread. In addition to working on the theory behind the model, I was individually responsible for creating a Python program to determine the probability of in-class disease transmission.

To prepare for more traditional epidemiologic research, I am developing my background in the field by participating in the Take Five program at my school. This program allows select students to develop a year-long curriculum that explores some intellectual question; if accepted, these courses are tuition free. My curriculum examines the effect of disease on history, culture, and science, and includes research projects in epidemiology and the history of medicine. This semester I began working with the chief of the epidemiology division at the University of Rochester Medical Center on the first of my research projects in epidemiology. I will be conducting a literature review of research on metabolic dysfunction, including high BMI or blood pressure, in relation to cognitive development, in particular school performance and IQ.

I would be honored to continue my research at the DCEG. The summer program at the DCEG stands out as having both a wider range of topics and a higher caliber of question than any other program I have encountered. While I would be thrilled to participate in practically any project listed, I would be most interested in working on population-based estimates of cancer risk, family cancer studies, descriptive studies of cancer, risk factors for cancer, and the relationship between infectious disease and cancer. I am specifically interested in focusing on breast, prostate, or lung cancer. I believe that my experience in mathematical modeling and epidemiologic research, as well as my interpersonal, organizational, and communication skills gained through work as a writing tutor and mathematics TA, would make me a productive addition to the DCEG research program.