

## Completing the Work—Essays for Grad School

### *Work on revisions in the appropriate sequence.*

- **Focus of essay.** Be sure that your essay answers the question(s) asked!
- **Completeness.** Provide enough detail to clarify your ideas, your intentions. Readers should feel a sense of closure as they finish reading your essay.
- **Clarity.** The purpose of every detail you've included should be obvious to your readers. A strong picture of you and your strengths should emerge from the essay.
- **Organization.** The essay should have a clear beginning, middle, and end, which should flow into one another smoothly. Strong transitions move the readers along, helping them understand the connections you have drawn between your experiences and your future plans. Present your paragraphs in a logical order, a logic that will be clear to your readers.
- **Sentence and Paragraph Structure.** Aim for variety, not so much as to create a three-ring circus on the page, but enough to prevent your readers from nodding off. Some shorter sentences, some longer. Same for paragraphs. Some sentences beginning with the subject, some beginning with an introductory phrase or clause. Some paragraphs beginning with a topic sentence, others with a transition sentence. All accurate and complete.
- **Language and Tone.** The essay need not be stiff and overly formal. If you can induce a smile or a chuckle in your readers, go for it. You want it to sound like YOU, so use the language you use every day rather than some artificial, intellectual nonsense. This doesn't mean that you don't want to sound smart and confident, because you do. Choose words wisely—the exact one, the colorful one—and strive for an overall effect of true humanity, avoiding all the worst traits of the species (egotism, cynicism, know-it-all-ism, desperation, emotional neediness). And be sure to avoid sexist language.

### *Edit carefully.*

- Spellcheck and grammarcheck will catch many of your errors . . . but not all of them. Use a dictionary and good human spellers and grammarians.
- Replace all general, non-specific references with specific nouns. Not: It was good for me. But: The experience taught me to appreciate every breath I take.
- Read aloud as you edit. To help proofread, read your essay backwards, from last sentence to first.

### *Check final details.*

- Your essay falls within the word or page limit required.
- Be sure you have the names right, both of people and of institutions.
- The work is neat and clean in appearance.