

First Draft Checklist

Before you think you're satisfied with your first draft essay, use this checklist to do some essential "OC."

The good

- The essay reveals something insightful about yourself or your personality
- Introduction clearly states what the essay is about
- Used imagery to make your story vivid and memorable
- Varied your sentence structure (not all short, not all long, not all starting with "I")
- Used active verbs
- Single focus maintained throughout
- Has the right tone—honest and sincere
- Smooth transition between paragraphs
- Every point supported by examples
- Answered the essay question

The bad

- No plagiarized material (using another person's words without giving credit)
- No misspelled words (don't rely on spell-check)
- No run-on sentences or other grammatical errors
- Unnecessary words or sentences that do not support the main point
- Wrong facts—e.g., placed city in wrong country, attributed wrong book to author
- Referring to the wrong college if reusing essay from another application

The ugly

- Clichés or overused catchwords or phrases
- Boring "laundry list" of activities and accomplishments
- Reads like a generic essay—anyone could have written it
- Dumb jokes or gimmicky attempts to be clever
- Sarcasm or flippant tone
- Inappropriate language, slang, or anything in bad taste