



# Longer Work That Wins – The Scholastic Novel Excerpt and Writing Portfolio Playbook

Step-by-step craft, real award-level analysis, and workshop assignments for grades 9 to 12.

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Each part teaches the skill, shows how winning writers make their choices, and ends with workshop assignments. Coaching notes and model responses are at the back.

## 10.1 The Novel Excerpt: Synopsis, Scope, and Selection

The Novel category judges a slice of a book plus a short synopsis, all inside 3,000 words. Learn what to choose, how to summarize, and how to budget your words.

### Why This Matters

The Novel category is open only in the senior division (grades 9 to 12), and it asks for something unusual: an excerpt, meaning a full chapter or a section, of a longer prose work, plus a synopsis of about 250 words at the top of the same text box. The whole entry is capped at 3,000 words including the synopsis. Scholastic's stated juror criteria are originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision. It publishes no rubric beyond that and no tier percentages, so any claim below about what separates tiers is coach's inference from described winners.

Students lose points in three ways. They paste the first 3,000 words of a draft without choosing, so the excerpt ends mid-scene. They write a synopsis that teases instead of tells, leaving the juror unable to place the excerpt. And they run over the cap by forgetting the synopsis counts. A note on selectivity: one national winner reported that only four of 570 novel entries in her year received a gold national medal, per a school-newspaper interview. Treat that as one year's scale, not a current statistic, but it signals that the category is crowded and that polish and choice matter.

### Core Ideas

Think of the entry as a package. The synopsis is the map, and the excerpt is the territory you ask the juror to walk. Together they must show a complete book and a finished stretch of prose. A juror cannot read your whole novel, so the package has to prove two things: that the book has an arc, and that the sentences deserve that arc.

### Official Rules for the Novel Category

Excerpt of a longer prose work: a full chapter or a section of one.

Maximum 3,000 words, which includes a synopsis of about 250 words at the top of 'My Work'.

Senior division only. Adaptations of or sequels to published works are not accepted.

Type or paste into the portal text box. No name or identifying information anywhere in the manuscript.

The work must be your own idea and creation. Influences go in Work Sources.

You may edit until your regional deadline. Deadlines begin Dec 1, 2026 and vary by region.

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A budget helps. Subtract about 250 words for the synopsis and you have roughly 2,750 for the excerpt. That is about eight to eleven pages of a typical novel, usually one chapter, or two short ones. Do not plan to squeeze a long chapter by cramming. Choose a chapter or section whose natural length fits.

How do you choose? Older rules referred to the first 3,000 words, and the current rules do not require an opening. So you have freedom, but no published guidance on how often winners pick openings versus mid-book chapters. That is an evidence gap. Use these criteria instead.

### Selection Test for Your Excerpt

Does it have its own mini-arc: a want, a complication, a change?

Does it show your voice at full strength within the first paragraph?

Can a reader who knows only the synopsis follow it without footnotes?

Does it end on a beat that makes the reader want the next chapter, not on an accidental stop?

Is it the strongest prose you have, not the most plot-heavy scene?

The **synopsis** is the part students most often get wrong. The official guidance is to treat it like a back-cover blurb that reveals the ending, which is the opposite of a teaser. A juror needs the whole arc: who the protagonist is, what they want, what goes wrong, the major turn, and how it ends. Use present tense, plain language, and specific nouns. Aim for 220 to 260 words, and count them.

| Synopsis element       | Question it answers                              | Typical share of 250 words |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Protagonist and world  | Who and where?                                   | 40 to 60 words             |
| Want and stakes        | What do they want and what is lost if they fail? | 40 to 60 words             |
| Complications          | What gets in the way?                            | 50 to 70 words             |
| Turn and ending        | What choice and what consequence?                | 50 to 70 words             |
| Where the excerpt fits | Which part of the arc is the sample?             | 15 to 25 words             |

## Case Studies

None of these novel excerpts could be read in full for this guide. The analyses rest on interviews and school or press descriptions, and craft readings are labeled as inference. We do not reproduce or invent text.

### CASE STUDY 1: MAPS TO NOWHERE (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, NOVEL, 2014; WARD MELVILLE HS STUDENT NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW)

Evidence level: interview. The writer, a junior, described the book as funny but sad, realistic, and energetic. She drafted during a November novel-writing month, planned a book of 250 to 350 pages, invents a personality before the plot, and used run-on sentences and lists on purpose to deliver backstory. She entered three novels and did not expect this one to win.

**SOLUTION**

Scope: a 250 to 350 page plan means the excerpt is a small part of a big structure, so the synopsis must carry the arc. Her stated method, personality first, suggests the excerpt works through voice more than plot.

Voice (interview-based inference): a deliberate blend of humor and melancholy gives the sentences a job. Using run-ons and lists to deliver backstory is a choice that turns exposition into character, a technique worth testing in your own chapter.

Selection: entering three manuscripts and picking the strongest one is a process lesson. Do not assume your favorite project is your best sample.

Limit: the interview does not describe the synopsis or the excerpt's position in the book. Do not copy her style. Copy the habit of choosing deliberately.

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**CASE STUDY 2: ALONG THE BEATEN PATH (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, BEST IN GRADE FOR 11TH GRADE, 2021; CAMPBELL HALL SCHOOL NEWS)**

Evidence level: school description. A young-adult novel about an 18-year-old Manitoba farm boy who robs banks across the Midwest to pay for his father's PTSD treatment, told in 48 parts with many allies and adversaries. The writer worked during remote-learning free time, imagining places he could not visit.

**SOLUTION**

Premise: a sympathetic motive for a crime creates a moral tension that a synopsis can state in one sentence. Judges can understand the stakes without reading further.

Structure (inference): a road-novel movement through places suits excerpting, because a chapter can be anchored by a location and a goal. The 48-part structure shows why the synopsis matters: no one chapter can show the full arc.

Selection: with many short parts, picking a complete part or two is easier than cutting a long one. If your book is built in short chapters, you have more freedom.

Limit: we do not know which part he submitted or how he wrote the synopsis.

**CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND THE WALL (REGIONAL GOLD KEY, NOVEL; EAGLE NEWS ARTICLE DATED 2017, AWARD YEAR LIKELY 2017)**

Evidence level: news description. A teenage girl lives in a city that holds the survivors of the last civilization, with strong female leads and nature elements. The article notes students could submit the first 3,000 words at that time.

**SOLUTION**

Reading (labeled inference): the premise, a walled survivor city, is a familiar dystopian setup. In this small sample, familiar premises appear at the regional level while national medal winners tend to have a more unusual angle. The sample is tiny and the confidence low.

What could raise it: specificity. A distinct rule of the city, an odd object, or a narrator voice that cannot be mistaken for another dystopia would make the same chapter feel like one author's.

Rule change: the old rule about the first 3,000 words is not the current rule. Today the excerpt can be a chapter or a section, and the synopsis counts in the 3,000.

Takeaway: a premise is a start. The excerpt must prove voice, and the synopsis must prove the book has somewhere to go.

## Step-by-Step

- 1 List candidate chapters** Write the number and a one-line summary of three to five chapters that might stand alone. Mark which are under 2,750 words.
- 2 Run the Selection Test** Score each candidate yes or no on the five questions. The winner is the one with the most yeses, not the one with the most plot.
- 3 Draft the synopsis from the ending back** Write the ending first in two sentences, then the turn, then the complication, then the want, then the world. Assemble in order.
- 4 Count to the cap** Paste synopsis plus excerpt together. Total must be 3,000 words or fewer. Trim the excerpt first if you must, never the ending of the synopsis.
- 5 Read it as a stranger** Ask a reader who does not know the book to read the synopsis and the excerpt and tell you the story back to you.
- 6 Final paste check** Put the synopsis at the top of the text box, add a clear break, and then the excerpt. Remove any name or identifying detail.

Two original coach samples follow, written for this guide, showing synopsis writing.

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BEFORE AND AFTER 1: A SYNOPSIS THAT TEASES

BEFORE:

Mira is a girl who lives by the sea. One day something happens that changes everything. Will she find out the truth about her family? Read to find out.

SOLUTION

AFTER:

Sixteen-year-old Mira runs the ferry her late father left behind, in a harbor town that is slowly emptying. She wants to keep the ferry running until her brother returns from the mainland. When she finds a ledger showing her father sold the ferry's license years ago, she must decide whether to expose the buyer, a family friend, or protect the town's last link to the coast. She chooses to burn the ledger, then regrets it. In the end, her brother returns with a new owner's offer, and Mira learns to share what she thought she had to hold alone.

What changed: the teaser asks questions and hides facts. The rewrite names the world, the want, the discovery, the choice, and the ending. A juror reading the excerpt (a chapter in which Mira finds the ledger) now knows exactly where it sits. The rewrite is also under 250 words and uses present-tense, concrete nouns (ferry, ledger, license).

BEFORE AND AFTER 2: CHOOSING WHERE THE EXCERPT STOPS

BEFORE (the end of a pasted 3,000-word block):

She went to the door and opened it. Chapter 3 begins here. Then the lights went out and she

SOLUTION

AFTER (a complete section that ends on a beat):

She stood at the open door, ledger under her arm, and listened to the tide pull the harbor apart. Somewhere behind her the kettle began to whistle. She did not turn around to turn it off.

What changed: the before version stops where the word count ran out. The after version ends where a unit of the book ends, on an image that closes the section and still opens a question. To make it fit, the writer cut earlier repeats and chose a chapter that ends naturally. The excerpt now reads as a deliberate selection, not a clipped file.

Tier Check

Scholastic publishes no rubric and no tier percentages. This table is coach's inference from the few described winners, with small samples and low confidence.

| Gold Medal level                                                                 | Silver Medal / Gold Key level                                      | Honorable Mention / unrecognized                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Excerpt selected deliberately: it has its own arc and an ending beat.            | Excerpt is readable and finished, but chosen by convenience.       | Excerpt is the first 3,000 words or a block that stops mid-scene. |
| Synopsis states the whole arc and the ending in clear, specific language.        | Synopsis covers the plot but is vague on the ending or the stakes. | Synopsis is a teaser, or missing, or pushes the total over 3,000. |
| An unusual angle or voice, such as a deliberate style or a surprising structure. | A clear premise with competent execution.                          | A familiar premise with no distinct angle.                        |
| Voice present from the first paragraph.                                          | Voice emerges halfway through.                                     | Voice is generic or borrowed from favorite authors.               |

Common traps

1. Counting the excerpt but forgetting the synopsis in the 3,000. 2. A synopsis that withholds the ending. 3. Submitting a prologue or world-building dump as the sample. 4. Writing a sequel or an adaptation of published work, which is not accepted.

Coach's Playbook

Choose by the Selection Test. Write the synopsis last-to-first. Budget 250 words for the synopsis and 2,750 for the excerpt. Test with a stranger. The final novel must be your own idea and your own writing.

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**Do This Tonight**

In 15 minutes, write a 250-word synopsis of your book, ending included, then count the words. Mark any sentence a stranger would not understand.

**Practice****WORKSHOP The Novel Excerpt: Synopsis, Scope, and Selection**

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Write a 250-word synopsis of a novel you are writing or imagine writing. Include the ending.
2. Cut your synopsis to 120 words, then expand a different version to 250. Say what each version emphasizes.
3. List five chapters or sections from your project. Score each with the Selection Test.
4. Write a one-sentence logline for your book, then use it as the first sentence of your synopsis.
5. Take a chapter and mark where it could end naturally. Rewrite the last three sentences to land on that beat.
6. Compute your word budget: synopsis words plus excerpt words, and the difference from 3,000.
7. Ask a friend to read only your synopsis and tell you what they expect in the excerpt. Record what they said.
8. Rewrite the Mira teaser synopsis for a different genre, such as a mystery or a comedy.
9. Write a paragraph defending your choice of excerpt, as if to a teacher, naming two reasons.
10. Write the first paragraph of your excerpt twice, once in a plain voice and once in a stronger voice. Say what changed.

**10.2 Making a Chapter Stand Alone**

A juror meets your book in the middle. Learn to give a chapter its own arc, its own orientation, and a voice strong enough to carry a reader who has read nothing else.

**Why This Matters**

Your excerpt is read cold. The juror has your synopsis, then a chapter or section, and nothing else. Scholastic's published criteria are originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision, and it gives no deeper rubric. So how a chapter stands alone is not an official standard. It is the practical problem that follows from the rules: the excerpt must prove skill and voice without the help of the rest of the book.

Students lose points when the chapter depends on earlier chapters for its meaning, when it opens with a lot of private context, or when it ends by trailing off because the writer stopped copying. Grades 9 and 10 should aim for a chapter with a clear scene, goal, and ending beat. Grades 11 and 12 should add a controlled voice and a sense of the book's larger design showing through one chapter.

**Core Ideas**

A stand-alone chapter does four jobs at once. It **orients** the reader (who, where, when) without a lecture. It **moves** (something changes between the first and last page). It **sounds like someone** (voice). And it **points beyond itself** (a thread the larger book will pull). If any of the four is missing, the juror feels the chapter is a fragment.

**The Four Jobs of a Stand-Alone Chapter**

**Orient:** within the first page, a reader knows the person, the place, and what is at stake right now.

**Move:** the chapter has a want, a complication, and a change, even a small one.

**Sound:** the voice is consistent, specific, and recognizable by the end of the first paragraph.

**Point:** the last beat leaves a question, an image, or a decision that the book can keep.

**Cut test:** remove any paragraph that does none of these four jobs.

**Orientation** is easy to botch. Two common errors are the info-dump (three paragraphs of backstory before anything happens) and the blank start (no sense of who or where). The fix is to orient through action. Put the character doing something in a specific place, and let one or two details do the explaining. Keep a note of what a first-time reader must know, and give only that. Everything else belongs in the synopsis, which is why the synopsis exists.

**Change within the chapter** is the second test. Ask what the character knows, has, or feels at the end that they did not at the start. If you cannot answer in a sentence, the chapter may be a transition scene, and a transition makes a weak sample. Choose a chapter in which something is decided, revealed, or lost.

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**Voice** is the third. Voice lives in sentence rhythm, in the nouns you choose, in what the narrator notices and what they ignore. One of the described winners said she used run-on sentences and lists on purpose to deliver backstory, which is a good illustration: a stylistic choice can solve an orientation problem if it is controlled. Voice that wanders between registers reads as accident.

### Cold-Read Checklist

After page one, can a stranger name the narrator, the place, and the problem?

Is every name introduced with a role or relationship the first time it appears?

Does each time shift carry a cue (a date, a season, a tense change, a place)?

Is there one image or line that only your narrator could have written?

Does the last paragraph close the unit while leaving one question open?

| Problem in a cold read | Symptom                                                  | Fix                                                                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lost reader            | Names appear with no hint who they are                   | Tag each new person with a role or a relationship in the same sentence               |
| Backstory clog         | Past-perfect paragraphs before the first action          | Move one detail into a gesture or a line of dialogue; leave the rest to the synopsis |
| Flat chapter           | Nothing changes between first and last page              | Add a reveal, a decision, or a loss in the last third                                |
| Dangling end           | Stops mid-scene or on a plot cliffhanger with no feeling | End on an image or a choice that closes the section and keeps a question             |

### Case Studies

The excerpts themselves were not available in full. Analyses are tied to descriptions and interviews, and each is labeled with its evidence level. Where craft is inferred, we say so.

#### CASE STUDY 1: ALONG THE BEATEN PATH (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, BEST IN GRADE FOR 11TH GRADE, 2021; CAMPBELL HALL SCHOOL NEWS)

Evidence level: school description. A young-adult novel in 48 parts about an 18-year-old Manitoba farm boy who robs banks across the Midwest to pay for his father's PTSD treatment, with many allies and adversaries. Written during remote learning, imagining places the writer could not visit.

**SOLUTION**

Stand-alone potential: a 48-part structure means each part is short and presumably self-contained, which is helpful for selection. A part anchored to one place and one goal can orient the reader fast.

Orientation by premise (inference): the central tension, a sympathetic motive for a crime, can be stated in a sentence of the synopsis, which frees the chapter from explaining it. Then the chapter can show one bank, one decision, one cost.

Movement: road-style episodes are built on arrivals and departures, which gives each chapter a natural beginning and an ending beat.

Limit: we do not know which part was submitted. The lesson: if your book is episodic, each chapter should be tested as a unit.

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**CASE STUDY 2: TOO CLOSE TO THE STARS (GOLD MEDAL, NATIONAL, NOVEL EXCERPT; YEAR INFERRED AS 2016 FROM A COLORADO PUBLIC RADIO SEGMENT)**

Evidence level: radio segment description. A 15-year-old writer in Pueblo, Colorado. The book follows Amelia, who lives with a cruel stepfather; an English teacher sends her manuscript to a publisher; the book alternates between before-and-after timelines. The tier wording is 'national gold medal' without saying Medal or Key. Treat tier as reported.

**SOLUTION**

Structure: alternating timelines are a structural hook that a synopsis can give in a sentence. The excerpt then has to prove it can handle the cut between times in a single stretch of prose.

Stand-alone risk (inference): dual timelines can confuse a cold reader. A writer would likely need clear time cues at each shift, such as a date, a setting detail, or a change in verb tense, so the juror always knows when they are.

Book-within-a-book: a character whose manuscript changes her life gives the writer a built-in reason for the voice to be self-aware and literary, which can help a chapter sound like someone.

Process: the writer drafted part of it in a November novel-writing challenge, and a teacher's advocacy is part of the story. A sponsoring teacher can be a real help in choosing the excerpt.

**CASE STUDY 3: MAPS TO NOWHERE (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, NOVEL, 2014; WARD MELVILLE HS STUDENT NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW)**

Evidence level: interview. The writer said the book is funny but sad, realistic, and energetic, that she invents a personality before building plot, and that she uses run-on sentences and lists on purpose to deliver backstory. Only four of 570 novel entries in her year reportedly received a national gold medal.

**SOLUTION**

Voice as a standalone engine: a character-first method means the chapter's engine is personality. A cold reader can follow a vivid person even without prior chapters.

Backstory handled by style (interview-based): using lists and run-ons to compress backstory lets exposition move at the speed of the character's mind. This is a way to orient without stopping the scene.

Tone: the blend of humor and sadness is a way to give a chapter movement of feeling, even when the plot is quiet.

Limit: the interview does not describe the chapter chosen. Do not imitate the sentence style; test your own deliberate choice and see whether it orients and moves.

## Step-by-Step

- 1 Write the one-sentence change** Complete this sentence: at the start of the chapter the character \_\_\_\_; by the end \_\_\_\_\_. If you cannot, pick another chapter or add the change.
- 2 List what a stranger must know** Write three to five facts a first-time reader needs on page one. Everything else is cut or moved to the synopsis.
- 3 Rebuild the opening** Start with the character doing something in a specific place, and slip in the needed facts through the action. Keep the first page under 300 words of setup.
- 4 Mark references to other chapters** Highlight any name, object, or event that depends on earlier pages. Explain it in a clause, or cut it.
- 5 Strengthen the voice line** Underline your three most distinctive sentences. Rewrite the three weakest to match their rhythm and diction.
- 6 Rewrite the last paragraph** End on an image or decision that closes the section and still opens a question.

The two samples below are original coach samples, written for this guide.

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BEFORE AND AFTER 1: ORIENTATION THROUGH ACTION

BEFORE:  
It had been three years since the fire that destroyed the mill and killed Uncle Rafe, and since then the town had changed, and Ines had also changed, and her mother had stopped speaking about it, which was why Ines went to the river that morning.

SOLUTION

AFTER:  
In the morning, Ines carried her uncle's boots to the river, where the mill's black ribs still stood in the shallows. Three years, and her mother still would not say his name in the house.  
What changed: the original delivers all the backstory in one long clause. The rewrite puts Ines in motion (carrying boots), in a place (the river by the ruined mill), and keeps only two facts (the fire's age and her mother's silence). The boots do emotional work that the phrases 'changed' and 'changed' could not. A cold reader knows who, where, and what hurts after two sentences.

BEFORE AND AFTER 2: GIVING A CHAPTER ITS OWN ENDING BEAT

BEFORE:  
She finished the soup and the evening went on. Later that night they talked some more about the move, and then it got late.

SOLUTION

AFTER:  
She finished the soup. Her father rinsed the bowls, one, two, three, and set the third one on the shelf where it no longer belonged to anyone. 'We leave Friday,' he said, to the window.  
What changed: 'the evening went on' and 'it got late' are summary that stops the chapter without closing it. The rewrite uses a specific action (the third bowl) to mark the family's loss and ends on a line that decides something (Friday). It closes the chapter's unit and leaves the next chapter a question: what happens Friday?

Tier Check

Scholastic gives no rubric and no tier percentages. The table below is coach's inference from described winners and the stated criteria; the sample is small and the confidence is low.

| Gold Medal level                                                                 | Silver Medal / Gold Key level                              | Honorable Mention / unrecognized                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Chapter orients by action; a stranger knows the stakes in one page.              | Chapter orients clearly but with a paragraph of backstory. | Chapter assumes the reader has read earlier pages. |
| A visible change by the end; the chapter feels like a short story with a future. | A change exists but is small or told.                      | Nothing changes; it is a transition scene.         |
| Voice is controlled and distinctive: style choices solve problems.               | Voice is clear but sometimes borrowed.                     | Voice shifts between registers.                    |
| Ends on an image or decision that closes and opens.                              | Ends cleanly but without resonance.                        | Stops mid-scene or fizzles.                        |

Common traps

1. Opening with a dream, a weather report, or a mirror description. 2. Referring to events from earlier chapters without a one-clause reminder. 3. Letting timelines jump with no cue. 4. Ending on a cliffhanger that is only a plot gimmick.

Coach's Playbook

One-sentence change, three to five must-know facts, orientation through action, a voice pass, and a final beat. Have a stranger read it cold. All of it must be your own writing.

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**Do This Tonight**

In 15 minutes, give the first page of your best chapter to someone who has not read the book. Ask them to tell you who, where, and what is at stake. Fix the first thing they missed.

**Practice****WORKSHOP Making a Chapter Stand Alone**

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Write the one-sentence change for three chapters of your project. Pick the strongest.
2. List the three to five facts a stranger needs to enter your chosen chapter. Draft the first 150 words that deliver them through action.
3. Highlight every reference to earlier chapters in your excerpt. Rewrite two of them with a short clause.
4. Rewrite your opening paragraph so it starts with a character doing something in a specific place.
5. Write a paragraph with a time shift (flashback or timeline change) and add two cues that tell the reader when they are.
6. Underline your three best sentences and rewrite three weaker ones to match.
7. Rewrite the last paragraph of your chapter three ways: an image, a decision, and a question. Choose one and defend it.
8. Take a chapter that stops mid-scene and find the real end of the section. Rewrite the final lines.
9. Give your opening page to a stranger and record what they understood and missed.
10. Write a two-sentence note explaining which of the four jobs your chapter does least well and how you will fix it.

**10.3 The Senior Writing Portfolio: Choosing Six Works**

The Writing Portfolio is for graduating seniors only and judges six works as one body. Learn the rules, three proven strategies for choosing, and how to build a collection that reads like one author.

**Why This Matters**

The Writing Portfolio is open to graduating seniors only, grade 12. It asks for six works that show versatility, diverse techniques and styles, and a cohesive developed voice. Each piece must follow the word limit of its own category. Portfolios are judged as a body of work, blind to age, gender, and hometown. Scholastic's published juror criteria are originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision, with no deeper rubric and no tier percentages, so claims below about what separates portfolios are coach's inference from described winners.

Students lose points by assembling their six best individual pieces without asking whether they speak to each other, by repeating one form six times with no range, or by including a piece they have never revised. The stakes are real: Scholastic lists a Gold Medal Portfolio as its highest portfolio honor, with a scholarship of 12,500 dollars in 2026, and a Silver Medal with Distinction below it. In 2023, Scholastic counted 16 Gold and 24 Silver with Distinction across all fields, writing and art. That scarcity means shape and focus matter. Never treat any strategy as a promise of an outcome.

**Core Ideas****Official Portfolio Facts**

Eligible: graduating seniors only. Six works, each within its own category limit.

Required: a Writer Statement and a separate Personal Statement, each 100 to 500 words. Texts must differ.

Writer Statement is read by jurors, so no names or school. Personal Statement is seen only by the scholarship committee after national advancement.

Up to two portfolios per senior, with no work repeated across them. AI-generated statements are not allowed.

Fees: 40 dollars per portfolio (as of Oct 1, 2026), with a fee waiver available. Check your regional deadline.

A practical note on pieces. Portfolio works may also be entered individually and are judged separately. One described winner had a humor piece in her Gold portfolio that also earned its own Silver Medal. The profile does not state the order of events, and the rules bar the same work from two portfolios, so confirm how standalone and portfolio entries interact with your regional partner before you submit.

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Three strategies show up in the described winners. None is official, and a small sample cannot rank them. **Wide range with a stance** means many forms held together by a worldview or concept. **Organizing concept** means a one-word frame, such as culture, that every piece illuminates. **Narrow range, deep theme** means pieces mostly in one zone, such as lyrical poems and flash, unified by a subject. All three can be coherent. What matters is that a juror can say, after six pieces, what this writer cares about.

| Strategy                 | How it holds together                                     | Risk                                                  |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Wide range with a stance | Varied forms, consistent attitude or worldview            | Can read as a sampler if the attitude is vague        |
| Organizing concept       | A single idea every piece explores from a different angle | A concept that is too broad ('life') explains nothing |
| Narrow range, deep theme | Similar forms, a recurring subject and imagery            | Can feel repetitive if each piece makes the same move |

### The Six-Piece Audit

Range: how many different forms or techniques appear? Name them.

Spine: finish the sentence, 'These six works are all about...' in under 15 words.

Peak: which piece is strongest, and does it appear early enough to be read with fresh attention?

Weak link: which piece would you cut if you could swap it for a better one?

Revision: does every piece show evidence of at least two serious drafts?

## Case Studies

None of these portfolios could be read in full for this guide. Analyses rest on school and press profiles, and Scholastic's own newsroom pages, which list winners but give no portfolio descriptions. Craft readings are labeled inference.

### CASE STUDY 1: THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE END OF IT (GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO, 2023; TOWNE POST PROFILE AND SCHOLASTIC'S WINNER LIST)

Evidence level: profile. A senior from Noblesville High School, Indiana. The six works: one poem, two science-fiction stories, two humor pieces, and one opinion article from the school newspaper. The profile gives the theme as life's needless complications being annoying but meaningful. A humor piece also earned its own Silver Medal, and she had won a Silver Medal portfolio earlier, showing two portfolios were allowed. She said she waited to build courage and that a teacher encouraged her.

**SOLUTION**

Range: five forms (poetry, science fiction, humor, opinion journalism) in six pieces is wide. The portfolio's title states a theme rather than a genre, which is a way to unify variety.

Spine (inference): a consistent comic-ironic worldview ties humor, speculative fiction, and opinion together. Readers hear the same mind in different clothes.

Strategy: wide range with a stance. A standout piece in a standalone category shows that individual strength and portfolio unity can coexist.

Process: she waited and then entered twice, with teacher support. Limit: we cannot see the order of the works or the statement.

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**CASE STUDY 2: GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO BY A TEXAS SENIOR, INCLUDING THE DAV PILKEY WRITING PORTFOLIO AWARD (2023; SCHOLASTIC NEWSROOM PROFILE)**

Evidence level: Scholastic newsroom profile and Q&A. A mix of profiles, essays, narratives, a critique of a reality TV show, an op-ed on school gun violence, an editorial on endangered languages, and a critical essay on why young voices matter. The writer says the through-line is culture in its many senses. The profile reports a 12,500 dollar scholarship; the piece is described in summary figures.

**SOLUTION**

Spine: the one-word concept, culture, appears across topics as different as influencer culture and gun culture. The concept is broad but is made specific by each angle.

Range: genre variety (profile, critique, op-ed, editorial, essay), mainly journalism and nonfiction. Voice stays consistent through values: young voices deserve to be taken seriously.

Self-awareness (inference): the critical essay on why young voices matter doubles as a statement about why she writes. That echoes the function of the Writer Statement and shows a portfolio can name its own through-line.

Limit: the profile does not show piece order or the statement text. Do not copy the topic. Copy the habit of finding a single concept that six pieces can approach.

**CASE STUDY 3: ON LIVING AND AFTERWARDS (GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO, YEAR NOT STATED, PRE-2023; SCHOLASTIC REGIONAL BLOG)**

Evidence level: regional blog post, with the 10,000 dollar scholarship wording from the older era. The writer describes poems, short stories, and flash fiction exploring memory and grief, which she calls her favorites from the past year, with recurring inspiration from remembrance, nostalgia, family, and heritage.

**SOLUTION**

Strategy: narrow range, deep theme. Poetry, flash, and short story sit in a lyrical-prose zone, and the subject (memory and grief) is the glue.

Contrast (inference): compared with wide-range portfolios, this one trades variety of genre for depth. It suggests more than one successful path, but the sample is tiny.

Craft point: when forms are similar, differences must come from technique, such as compression in poems versus scene-building in stories, so that the portfolio shows skill range inside a theme.

Limit: the blog gives no pieces or order. A related single-form example, a Gold Medal Portfolio from 2021 titled My Loveless Memories, reportedly consisted of poems about personal experience, which suggests even a single form can reach the top, but how range was shown is unverified.

## Step-by-Step

- 1 Gather every candidate** List all finished pieces from grades 9 through 12 with category, word count, and revision status. Aim for 10 to 15 candidates.
- 2 Sort by form and theme** Make two columns, forms and recurring subjects. Notice what you return to without planning it.
- 3 Choose a strategy** Pick wide range with a stance, organizing concept, or narrow range with deep theme. Write one sentence on why it fits your work.
- 4 Select six and run the audit** Run the Six-Piece Audit. Swap the weak link for a stronger candidate or revise it.
- 5 Check each piece against its category rules** Word limits, labels for excerpts, no names, sources listed. Each piece is judged on its own category's limits.
- 6 Order the six** Put a strong piece first and a strong piece last. Arrange the middle so adjacent works echo or contrast on purpose.

These two samples are original coach samples, written for this guide.

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BEFORE AND AFTER 1: FROM A PILE TO A SPINE

BEFORE (portfolio plan):  
1. Poem about my grandmother. 2. Story about a haunted house. 3. Essay about school lunch. 4. Poem about winter. 5. Story about a robot. 6. Review of a video game.  
Spine: these are my best pieces.

SOLUTION  
AFTER (portfolio plan):  
1. Poem: my grandmother's kitchen. 2. Flash: a robot that cooks one recipe forever. 3. Essay: the school lunch line as a map of who belongs. 4. Story: a haunted house that is really a house emptied of family. 5. Review: a cooking game and why it comforts me. 6. Poem: winter, when the kitchen is the only warm room.  
Spine: rooms where people feed each other, and what happens when they stop.  
What changed: the writer kept the same six works but revised three to bring the shared subject (feeding, kitchens, belonging) forward, and reordered them so the opening and closing poems frame the set. 'These are my best pieces' became a spine a juror can repeat. The forms stay varied (poem, flash, essay, story, review), so range is intact.

BEFORE AND AFTER 2: REPLACING A WEAK LINK

BEFORE (weak link):  
Piece 5, a story written in one night for class, with a twist ending where it was all a dream, 2,600 words.

SOLUTION  
AFTER (replacement):  
Piece 5, a 900-word flash fiction about a bus driver who counts passengers aloud each morning, revised through four drafts, ending on the one day the count is off by one.  
What changed: the replacement is shorter, revised, and tied to the portfolio's spine of attention and absence. The dream twist, which usually reads as a lack of ending, is gone. The shorter piece also gives the portfolio breathing room, since each piece obeys its own category limit. The writer traded length for control.

Tier Check

Scholastic does not publish a portfolio rubric or tier percentages, and public data cannot separate Silver with Distinction from Gold. The table is coach's inference from a handful of described winners. Treat it as hypotheses.

| Gold Medal level                                                                   | Silver Medal / Gold Key level                                   | Honorable Mention / unrecognized                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Six works read like one author with a stance, whether the range is wide or narrow. | Six strong works with some shared interests but no clear spine. | Six unrelated pieces, or one form repeated without growth. |
| Every piece shows serious revision and meets its category rules.                   | Most pieces are polished; one or two are first-draft quality.   | Several pieces are unrevised or break category limits.     |
| Order is deliberate; first and last pieces carry weight.                           | Order is chronological or random.                               | Strongest pieces are buried or the first piece is weak.    |
| Range is shown through technique, not just topic.                                  | Range is mostly topic.                                          | No evidence of range.                                      |

Common traps

1. Choosing six favorites without a spine. 2. Repeating a piece across two portfolios, which is not allowed. 3. Including a piece with a name or identifying detail. 4. Treating the portfolio as separate from the statement, instead of writing both to say the same true thing.

Coach's Playbook

Gather ten to fifteen, pick a strategy, run the Six-Piece Audit, swap the weak link, check every category's rules, order deliberately. Every piece and both statements must be your own work.

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**Do This Tonight**

In 15 minutes, list every finished piece you own. Next to each, write its form and one recurring subject word. Circle any word that appears three times.

**Practice****WORKSHOP The Senior Writing Portfolio: Choosing Six Works**

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Make an inventory of all your finished writing: title, form, word count, revision count.
2. Create a two-column chart of forms and recurring subjects across your inventory. Note any surprises.
3. Complete the sentence 'These six works are all about...' in under 15 words, for three different selections.
4. Choose one of the three strategies and write a 100-word case for why it fits your work.
5. Run the Six-Piece Audit on your current six. Name the weak link.
6. Draft a replacement for the weak link, either by revising an existing piece or outlining a new one.
7. Write the order of your six works and a sentence explaining each adjacency.
8. Check each of your six against its category rules. List word counts and any changes needed.
9. Ask a reader to read your six titles and one-sentence summaries and tell you what they think you care about.
10. Write a 150-word note on what your portfolio does that someone else's could not.

**10.4 The Writer Statement, the Personal Statement, and Cohesive Voice**

Two statements, two readers, two different jobs. Learn what each must do, how to keep names out, and how to show one voice across everything you submit.

**Why This Matters**

A Writing Portfolio is submitted with a Writer Statement and a separate Personal Statement, each 100 to 500 words. Scholastic says they must be different texts, and AI-generated portfolio statements are not allowed. The Writer Statement is read by jurors during selection. The Personal Statement is seen only by the scholarship committee after a portfolio advances nationally. Scholastic's juror criteria are originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision, and no further rubric is published. No winning statements were publicly readable when this guide was researched, so everything below on style is coach's inference from the rules, Scholastic's published tips, and portfolio profiles.

Students lose points by repeating the same text in both statements, by listing their awards instead of explaining their choices, by putting a name or a school in a statement, and by writing statements that describe a different writer than the portfolio shows. Seniors are expected to write with the same precision they show in their best piece.

**Core Ideas****Two Statements, Two Jobs**

**Writer Statement** (jurors): about the six pieces. Tell the reader what to understand, your process, your deliberate choices (voice, devices, form), and your recurring ideas or goals.

**Personal Statement** (scholarship committee): about you. A story from your life that shows character or shaped you, such as a challenge or setback and how it shaped you as a writer.

Length: 100 to 500 words each. Different text in each. Neither may contain your name, school, or any identifying detail.

Both must be your own words. AI-generated statements are not allowed, and AI use must be disclosed in the entry.

The **Writer Statement** is an argument. Its claim is: these six works belong together, and here is how to read them. Good ones name the spine in a sentence, point to two or three deliberate choices, and show how the writer's methods changed across the pieces.

Scholastic's published tips emphasize explaining what readers should understand and your process; treat it as a short guide for a smart reader who has not met you.

The **Personal Statement** is a story. It should be a scene or sequence from your life, told with the same attention to detail as your fiction or essays. It does not need to be about writing, though Scholastic suggests a challenge or setback and how it shaped you as a writer is a good fit. It is read only by the scholarship committee after national advancement, but it should still be free of names and other identifiers as a precaution, per the manuscript rule that no identifying information appears in work or statements.

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| Feature | Writer Statement                            | Personal Statement                                |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Reader  | Jurors, during selection                    | Scholarship committee, after national advancement |
| Subject | The six works and your choices              | A story from your life                            |
| Shape   | Claim, evidence from the pieces, reflection | Scene or sequence, turn, reflection               |
| Tone    | Precise, confident, modest                  | Honest, specific, vivid                           |
| Do not  | Summarize each piece one by one             | List achievements or repeat the Writer Statement  |

**Cohesive voice** is the thread through everything. Voice is not a trick or a fixed style. It is the set of habits that makes your pages sound like you: what you notice, the length and rhythm of your sentences, the words you reach for, your attitude toward your subject. A described winner whose portfolio ranged across humor, science fiction, a poem, and opinion was unified by a comic-ironic worldview. Another, working across journalism, was unified by a concept and a consistent stance. A third, working in lyrical forms, was unified by subject and imagery. Different routes, same result: a reader could recognize one author.

## Voice Audit

Take the first paragraph of each of your six pieces. Underline the three most distinctive phrases in each.

Look for repeated moves: a kind of image, a joke structure, a sentence rhythm, a stance on authority.

Name the pattern in a sentence. That sentence belongs in your Writer Statement.

Check that the statements themselves use the same habits. A flat statement beside vivid pieces breaks the voice.

Remove any phrase you do not mean. Voice is truthfulness more than style.

## Case Studies

No winner statements are public, so these case studies analyze the portfolios' public profiles for the choices a statement would have to explain. Craft readings are inference, labeled as such, and we do not quote the students beyond one short phrase.

### CASE STUDY 1: GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO BY A TEXAS SENIOR (2023; SCHOLASTIC NEWSROOM PROFILE)

Evidence level: Scholastic newsroom profile. Journalism-heavy mix: profiles, essays, narratives, a critique of a reality TV show, an op-ed on school gun violence, an editorial on endangered languages, and a critical essay on why young voices matter. The writer names culture, in many senses, as the through-line, and says her identity as an immigrant and member of Gen Z shapes her voice, including occasional deliberate grammar quirks.

#### SOLUTION

What a Writer Statement could claim: the spine in one word (culture), the range in genres, and the deliberate choice of voice. The profile suggests she can name all three, which is exactly what the statement asks for.

Self-reference (inference): the critical essay about why young voices matter functions as a mini-statement inside the portfolio. Strong portfolios sometimes let a piece say what the statement then says plainly.

Voice: deliberate grammar quirks tied to identity is the sort of choice a statement can explain in a sentence, turning a possible weakness into a stated method.

Limit: we have not read her statements. Do not imitate the concept; practice naming your own spine.

### CASE STUDY 2: THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE END OF IT (GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO, 2023; TOWNE POST PROFILE)

Evidence level: local profile. Six works across poetry, science fiction, humor, and opinion, unified by the theme that life's needless complications are annoying but meaningful. The writer waited to gain courage before entering, credits teacher encouragement, and says she works hard because being a writer matters to her.

#### SOLUTION

Writer Statement angle: the title doubles as a thesis. A statement could explain why that phrase, a sentence that wishes complications away, names the book of work. The statement then shows how the humor and the science fiction are two ways of sitting inside the same complication.

Personal Statement angle (inference): the profile's personal details, waiting for courage and a teacher's push, are the raw material of a story about a setback or hesitation that shaped her. The Personal Statement should tell it as a scene, not as a summary.

Cohesive voice: a comic-ironic stance crosses forms. The statement is a place to show that same stance without turning silly.

Limit: the profile does not reproduce either statement. Do not assume a specific structure.

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**CASE STUDY 3: ON LIVING AND AFTERWARDS (GOLD MEDAL PORTFOLIO, PRE-2023; SCHOLASTIC REGIONAL BLOG)**

Evidence level: regional blog. Poems, short stories, and flash fiction exploring memory and grief, which the writer calls her favorites from the past year. Recurring inspiration includes remembrance, nostalgia, family, and heritage. Another single-form Gold portfolio, *My Loveless Memories* (2021), reportedly gathered poems and the writer said writing separates her from painful events.

**SOLUTION**

Writer Statement angle: when forms are similar, the statement can explain how technique varies across them: compression in the poems, scene-building in the stories, a single turn in the flash. That makes range visible.

Personal Statement angle: grief, heritage, and family are themes where the personal story and the work overlap. The risk is repeating content from the Writer Statement. The rule that the two must differ means one should discuss craft, the other a lived scene.

Sensitivity: if your subject is painful, the statements are still allowed to be honest while leaving out names and identifiers.

Limit: neither blog reproduces a statement. These are possible uses, not known facts.

**Step-by-Step**

- 1 Write the spine sentence** After your Voice Audit, write one sentence beginning 'These six works...' Cut any adjective you cannot defend.
- 2 Outline the Writer Statement in four moves** Open with the spine, then two deliberate choices with a piece named by title, then how your methods changed, then what you want a reader to leave with.
- 3 Choose a scene for the Personal Statement** List three moments from your life that changed how you write or think. Choose the one with a concrete setting and a turn.
- 4 Draft each separately** Write the two statements on different days so the language does not blur. Do not reuse sentences.
- 5 Strip identifiers** Delete names, your school, your town, and other details that could identify you in both statements and in all six pieces.
- 6 Read all eight texts together** Read the six pieces and two statements in order. Mark anything that does not sound like the same person and fix it.

Two original coach samples follow, written for this guide.

**BEFORE AND AFTER 1: A WRITER STATEMENT OPENING****BEFORE:**

I have loved writing since I was little. I have won many awards and my teachers say I am talented. In this portfolio you will see poems, stories, and essays.

**SOLUTION****AFTER:**

These six works are about rooms where people feed each other, and what happens when they stop. A poem opens the kitchen. A flash story hands it to a robot that knows one recipe. An essay widens it to a school cafeteria, and I chose a different form each time to ask a different question of the same table.

What changed: the before version lists feelings and awards, then forecasts forms. The after version names the spine in the first sentence, then points to forms as deliberate choices. It uses concrete nouns and avoids praise of the writer. It also keeps names and schools out, as required.

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BEFORE AND AFTER 2: A PERSONAL STATEMENT AS A SCENE

**BEFORE:**  
Writing has helped me through hard times. When my grandmother got sick I was sad and writing helped me cope. I learned that writing is important.

**SOLUTION**

**AFTER:**  
The night my grandmother stopped recognizing the kitchen, I stood in it holding a wooden spoon she had worn thin on one side. She asked who I was, politely, the way she asked strangers. I went upstairs and wrote down the exact shape of that spoon, because it was the one thing in the house that still remembered her hand.

What changed: the original summarizes an emotion and a moral. The rewrite places the writer in a specific room with a specific object and shows the moment writing became a way to hold on. The reflection can follow, but the scene does the work. Note that no name appears; 'my grandmother' is enough.

Tier Check

Scholastic publishes no rubric for statements or portfolios and no tier percentages. The table is coach's inference from the rules, Scholastic's tips, and portfolio profiles; the hypothesis that Gold portfolios feel like one author with a stance is unverified.

| Gold Medal level                                                                        | Silver Medal / Gold Key level                                             | Honorable Mention / unrecognized                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Writer Statement names a spine and explains deliberate choices tied to specific pieces. | Statement describes the pieces accurately but does not tie them together. | Statement lists awards or summarizes each piece in turn.       |
| Personal Statement is a specific scene with a turn and honest reflection.               | Personal Statement is sincere but general.                                | Personal Statement repeats the Writer Statement or the resume. |
| Voice is recognizable across statements and pieces.                                     | Voice is strong in pieces and flatter in the statements.                  | Voice changes from piece to piece.                             |
| No identifying information anywhere.                                                    | One minor slip, caught in review.                                         | Name, school, or town appears.                                 |

Common traps

1. Reusing sentences between statements. 2. Naming your school, town, or teacher. 3. Summarizing all six pieces one after another. 4. Using a tool to generate a statement, which is not allowed; both must be your own words.

Coach's Playbook

Voice Audit, spine sentence, four-move Writer Statement, one-scene Personal Statement, different days for each, strip identifiers, read all eight texts together. Confirm your regional deadline and fee details with your regional partner.

Do This Tonight

In 15 minutes, take the first paragraph of three of your pieces and underline the phrases that sound most like you. Write one sentence naming what they share.

Practice

WORKSHOP The Writer Statement, the Personal Statement, and Cohesive Voice

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

- 1. Do the Voice Audit on six pieces and write the pattern in one sentence.
- 2. Write three versions of your spine sentence and choose the truest.
- 3. Draft a 150-word Writer Statement opening that names the spine and two deliberate choices tied to titles.
- 4. List three moments from your life that changed how you write. Mark the one with the best setting and turn.

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5. Draft a 200-word scene for your Personal Statement with no names and no summary of feelings.
6. Write a reflection of 80 words to follow your scene, tying it to your writing without repeating the Writer Statement.
7. Compare your two drafts and list any repeated phrases or ideas. Replace each repetition.
8. Search all six pieces and both statements for names, schools, towns, and teacher names. Record your fixes.
9. Rewrite a flat sentence from a statement in the same voice as your strongest piece.
10. Ask a reader to read the two statements and tell you which sounds more like your pieces. Record their answer.

## 10.5 Bonus Lab: The Annotated Novel Excerpt and Portfolio Clinic

See an original synopsis, an annotated excerpt opening, and a Writer Statement excerpt, then use a six-pass plan to shape your own novel entry or writing portfolio.

### Why This Matters

The Novel category accepts an excerpt, a full chapter or section, of a longer prose work, up to 3,000 words including a synopsis of about 250 words at the top. It is senior only. The Writing Portfolio, for graduating seniors, asks for six works plus a Writer Statement and a separate Personal Statement, each 100 to 500 words. Scholastic publishes originality, technical skill, and emergence of a personal voice or vision as its criteria, and nothing more detailed, so this lab is coaching. It gives you three original, labeled samples: a synopsis, an annotated opening, and a Writer Statement excerpt.

Remember the rule against identifying information: no name in the manuscript, headers, titles, or statements. The sample character names below are fictional.

#### COACH'S SAMPLE (ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER): SYNOPSIS (ABOUT 250 WORDS)

Synopsis (about 250 words): Wren Okafor is sixteen and the only person in Pell Harbor who can still read the tide tables her late grandmother kept. When the town council announces that the old cannery will be sold to a developer, Wren discovers that the sale depends on a boundary survey her grandmother quietly disputed for decades. The tables, written in a private shorthand, may prove the shoreline has moved. Wren has three weeks before the final vote. She begins decoding the tables with the help of Teo, a reluctant harbor mechanic who is also the council chair's nephew. Their alliance is fragile; Teo's family stands to lose its job if the cannery closes, and Wren's family stands to lose the house if the survey stands. As she works, Wren learns that her grandmother's careful records conceal a second purpose: they track the disappearance of a fishing boat in 1987, and the person who may have caused it is still alive in town. Wren must decide whether to publish what she finds, sparing the harbor from the developer but exposing a neighbor who raised her after her mother left, or to stay silent and keep the only family she has. The novel moves from mystery to moral reckoning, ending not with a verdict but with Wren walking the tide line at low water, choosing which truths to carry. The excerpt submitted is the opening chapter, in which Wren finds the tables hidden behind a loose board and first understands what they might mean.

#### SOLUTION

Development: the synopsis names a protagonist, a want with a deadline, a complication, and a moral choice. It does not hide the ending; a juror reading a slice of a book needs to know where the book is going.

Organization: four short paragraphs, one job each: setup, pursuit, stakes, then a single sentence that bridges to the excerpt. That last sentence matters because it tells the reader what the pages after the synopsis do.

Diction: verbs are active (discovers, decoding, decide) and the tone is plain. A synopsis is not a place for voice flourishes; save those for the pages that follow.

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**COACH'S SAMPLE (ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER): ANNOTATED EXCERPT OPENING**

The loose board was the third from the stove, the one Gran always told me not to step on. I stepped on it. Under the board, wrapped in a flour sack gone gray, were eleven tide books, each in her cramped ink, each ending the same way: a column of numbers with no dates beside them.

I sat down on the kitchen floor. The house smelled of salt and cold coffee. Somewhere beyond the wall the harbor clanked its chains, an animal turning in its sleep.

Gran had never kept a secret from me. Or I had never asked the right kind of question.

**SOLUTION**

Development: the chapter opens with a concrete discovery and a faint disobedience (stepping on the board), so the want starts immediately. The last line is the hinge that turns an object into a question of trust.

Organization: three paragraphs move from object to atmosphere to emotion. The excerpt must function as a complete section, so it needs its own small arc inside a larger book.

Syntax and diction: short declaratives ('I stepped on it') punctuate longer descriptive sentences. First-person voice is dry and observant; the harbor simile is the only figurative flourish, which keeps it memorable.

Devices: the missing dates are a planted mystery that a later chapter can pay off. Leave the reader curious about what the book will do, not what the excerpt already resolved.

**COACH'S SAMPLE (ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER): WRITER STATEMENT EXCERPT (ABOUT 100 WORDS)**

When I started writing, I thought a long story needed a big plot. Years of revising taught me otherwise: my best pages are the ones where an object, a weather report, or a half-finished sentence in a character's mouth holds the whole weight of a scene. The six works in this portfolio span a novel excerpt, two short stories, a personal essay, a poem, and a flash piece, but they share one habit: I start from something small and look at it until it admits what it is hiding. I am still learning to trust that approach, and I think the portfolio shows the process, not just the result.

**SOLUTION**

Development: it states a belief, shows how that belief changed, then connects it to the whole body of work. A Writer Statement should explain choices, not brag.

Organization: three moves in roughly 100 words: starting assumption, revised understanding, evidence across the portfolio. Your full statement may run up to 500 words, so you can add one specific example of a revision.

Voice: first person, concrete, and slightly self-questioning. Scholastic notes that AI-generated portfolio statements are not allowed, so the statement must be your own writing.

## Revision Pass Plan

- 1 Pass 1: Choose the slice** Pick the chapter that works as a complete section, with its own beginning, turn, and ending, not a random middle.
- 2 Pass 2: Synopsis** Write about 250 words covering protagonist, want, obstacle, stakes, and direction. Count the words: the synopsis counts toward the 3,000 limit.
- 3 Pass 3: Opening** Rewrite the first page to start with a person doing something specific. Cut any setup that belongs in the synopsis.
- 4 Pass 4: Ending of the excerpt** End on a turn or open question that makes a reader curious about the book beyond.
- 5 Pass 5: Portfolio balance** If you are building a portfolio, list your six pieces and the technique each one shows. Replace any two that repeat the same skill.
- 6 Pass 6: Statements and proof** Write the Writer Statement and the separate Personal Statement, each within 100 to 500 words. Remove every name and identifier.

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## Novel and Portfolio Lab Checklist

Synopsis about 250 words and the total under 3,000.

Excerpt is a full chapter or section, not a random cut.

Opening starts with a person and a want.

Excerpt ends on a turn that points forward.

Portfolio: six works with visible variety and a cohesive voice (graduating seniors only).

Writer Statement and Personal Statement each 100 to 500 words, in your own words.

No identifying information anywhere.

## Common traps

A synopsis that only teases. An excerpt that stops mid-scene. Six portfolio pieces that all sound alike. Statements that summarize instead of reflecting.

## Do This Tonight

Write a six-line map of your portfolio: one line per piece with its category and the technique it shows. Circle the weakest line.

## Practice

### WORKSHOP Bonus Lab: The Annotated Novel Excerpt and Portfolio Clinic

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Write a 250-word synopsis of a novel idea of your own. Count every word.
2. Reduce your synopsis to 100 words. What did you have to protect?
3. Pick the chapter of your book that works best alone. List its beginning, turn, and ending.
4. Rewrite the first paragraph of that chapter so a specific person is doing a specific thing.
5. Annotate the sample opening: mark one sentence of development, one of diction, and one device.
6. Write a final paragraph for your excerpt that ends on a turn, not a summary.
7. If you are a graduating senior, list six pieces for a portfolio and the technique each demonstrates.
8. Draft a 100-word Writer Statement about how your approach to writing changed.
9. Remove every identifying detail from a draft title page, header, and statement. List what you removed.

### Notes Coaching Notes and Model Responses

What a strong response to each assignment looks like, and why. Compare after you draft, not before.

### 10.1 The Novel Excerpt: Synopsis, Scope, and Selection

#### WORKSHOP · THE NOVEL EXCERPT: SYNOPSIS, SCOPE, AND SELECTION

1. Coaching note: check that all five elements appear (protagonist, want, complication, turn, ending). If you used a question mark, you wrote a teaser. Replace the question with its answer.
2. Coaching note: the 120-word version keeps want, turn, and ending; the 250-word version adds world and complications. Strong writers can tell which version is the map and which is the tour.
3. Model: Chapter 4 scores yes on mini-arc, voice, standalone, ending beat, strongest prose. Chapter 1 scores no on standalone because it needs the previous scene. Pick the highest scorer, not the one that feels most important to the plot.
4. Model: 'A ferry captain's daughter must decide whether to expose her family's secret or save a dying town.' Then expand each clause into the synopsis.
5. Model: change 'Then she left.' to 'She left the door open, the way her father always had, and let the cold decide.' The ending now lands on an image and a character choice.
6. Coaching note: for example, 247 words of synopsis plus 2,700 of excerpt is 2,947, which is under the cap with margin. Always leave a margin of 20 to 50 words in case of counting differences.
7. Coaching note: if the friend predicts the wrong genre or stakes, your synopsis is unclear. Revise the first two sentences first.
8. Model: a mystery version begins 'When the ferry ledger goes missing, sixteen-year-old Mira becomes the town's prime suspect.' The same facts, reframed around a question that the book answers by the ending.

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9. Coaching note: strong reasons name the arc (it has a want and a turn) and the voice (it shows my style in the first paragraph). Avoid 'it is my favorite.'
10. Model: plain: 'The room was cold and quiet.' Stronger: 'The room kept the kind of quiet that makes you hear your own pockets.' The stronger line adds a sensory detail and a personality. Check that the stronger version still fits your narrator.

## 10.2 Making a Chapter Stand Alone

### WORKSHOP · MAKING A CHAPTER STAND ALONE

1. Coaching note: strong answers contain a verb of change, such as decides, discovers, loses, forgives. A weak answer says 'learns more about herself.'
2. Model: 'Ines hauled her uncle's boots down the bank, past the mill's black ribs.' This gives person, place, and a hint of loss in one action. Keep the other facts to a clause each.
3. Coaching note: 'after the fire' becomes 'after the mill fire.' Add only the minimum for comprehension. If a reference needs a paragraph, cut it.
4. Model: change 'It was a cold morning and Ben thought about his life' to 'Ben scraped ice off the bus-stop bench with his library card.' The action orients and shows character.
5. Model cues: 'Three winters earlier,' and a change from present-tense to past-tense for the memory, plus a different setting detail. Consistent cues stop a cold reader from guessing.
6. Coaching note: look for sentences with surprising nouns and controlled rhythm. Weak ones tend to be filled with 'very' and 'thing.' Matching means copying the pattern, not the content.
7. Model: image: the third bowl on the shelf; decision: 'We leave Friday'; question: 'Who would be waiting at the other end?' Pick the one that matches your book's tone.
8. Coaching note: the real end is usually a few paragraphs earlier than where you stopped. Choose the line after which the reader feels the unit close.
9. Coaching note: record verbatim what they say, even if it stings. If they cannot say who the narrator is, the orientation needs work.
10. Model: 'My chapter does Point least well; it ends neatly but offers no thread. I will end on the unopened letter.' Name one concrete fix.

## 10.3 The Senior Writing Portfolio: Choosing Six Works

### WORKSHOP · THE SENIOR WRITING PORTFOLIO: CHOOSING SIX WORKS

1. Coaching note: include unfinished work separately. Many seniors discover that their strongest pieces are the ones they revised most.
2. Coaching note: the surprise is often a subject that recurs in different forms, such as inheritance, borders, or food. That subject is a candidate spine.
3. Model: 'Rooms where people feed each other, and what happens when they stop.' A good spine is concrete and true of all six. If you need 'and' three times, narrow it.
4. Model: 'I choose organizing concept because my pieces span a poem, a review, and an essay yet all circle the idea of belonging.' Avoid claiming the strategy will win.
5. Coaching note: the weak link is usually a piece you added to fill a form slot. Name it plainly and decide whether to revise or replace.
6. Model: revise the dream-twist story into a 900-word flash that ends on a concrete image. An outline counts if it states want, obstacle, and ending.
7. Model: 'Poem 1 opens the kitchen; flash 2 turns it mechanical; essay 3 widens to the cafeteria.' Each adjacency should echo or contrast on purpose.
8. Coaching note: record numbers: 2,480 words for a short story is fine; 3,200 is over. Excerpts must be labeled. Check that no piece includes a name.
9. Coaching note: if the reader names a theme you did not intend, either lean into it or revise to clarify. Their reading is evidence.
10. Model: 'No one else writes about the school cafeteria and the haunted house as the same map.' The note should be specific to your voice or subject, not 'my work is unique.'

## 10.4 The Writer Statement, the Personal Statement, and Cohesive Voice

### WORKSHOP · THE WRITER STATEMENT, THE PERSONAL STATEMENT, AND COHESIVE VOICE

1. Model pattern: 'I notice small objects that hold family history, and I turn serious moments with a dry joke.' It should be specific enough that another writer could not claim it.
2. Coaching note: avoid abstractions like 'the human condition.' Compare versions and pick the one with concrete nouns that all six pieces can honestly claim.
3. Model: 'These six works are about rooms where people feed each other. In the flash story I gave the kitchen to a robot to ask what care is without a face; in the essay I widened it to a cafeteria to ask who gets fed first.' Titles can replace descriptions.
4. Coaching note: the best moment has an object, a place, and a change in you. Avoid the biggest moment if you cannot write it with detail.
5. Model start: 'The spoon was worn thin on one side.' Keep sentences concrete. A good scene stays in the moment and lets a final line carry the turn.
6. Model: 'I write things down because the page keeps what a room cannot. That habit became my method: object first, feeling second.' Keep it brief and different from the Writer Statement.
7. Coaching note: the usual repeat is the claim about why you write. Keep it in one statement only; give the other a fresh angle.

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8. Coaching note: also check file names and headers if you paste from a document. Replace 'Ms. Alvarez' with 'my teacher' and your town with 'a small harbor town' only if needed.
9. Model: 'I am passionate about writing' becomes 'I write the way some people check a lock, twice and then again.' Match the humor, rhythm, or image habit of your best piece.
10. Coaching note: if the reader picks the flatter one as more like you, revise the other until the voice matches. If they cannot decide, your voice is probably consistent.

## 10.5 Bonus Lab: The Annotated Novel Excerpt and Portfolio Clinic

### WORKSHOP · BONUS LAB: THE ANNOTATED NOVEL EXCERPT AND PORTFOLIO CLINIC

1. A full synopsis states who wants what, who or what stands in the way, and where the book ends. If you cannot say how it ends, spend a few minutes deciding, since jurors read the excerpt against the whole. Check the word count against the 3,000 limit.
2. A tighter synopsis is a test of priority. Keep the protagonist, the want, and the central choice. Cut subplots first, then secondary characters.
3. A good excerpt chapter can stand alone and ends changed from how it began. If none of your chapters pass, the best choice is often the one with the strongest turn.
4. Replace summary openers with action: 'On Monday I pulled the board up' beats 'My life had always been quiet.' Specific detail does more than a general mood.
5. Development appears in the loose-board discovery, diction in the plain verbs and harbor simile, and devices in the undated columns as a planted mystery. Your annotation should name what each choice does to the reader.
6. A good ending gestures forward: a new question, a decision, or an object the character cannot ignore. Avoid wrapping everything in a bow, since the excerpt is not the whole book.
7. The strongest portfolios mix categories and techniques, such as a story, an essay, and a poem, but share a recognizable voice. If two pieces use the same trick, swap one. This applies only to graduating seniors.
8. State what you believed, what changed, and what evidence shows it. Avoid claiming greatness; reflect. Keep the writing yours, as the rules do not allow AI-generated portfolio statements.
9. Check file names, running headers, signatures in the text, school names, and teacher names. The rules ask for no identifying information in the manuscript or statements, so remove them completely.

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