Here is a sample essay started but too long and then revised (below).

When you begin this process, sit down with friends or family members and brainstorm together. Challenge yourself and your friends to try to come up with multiple ideas for each prompt. Consider how much better your essay could be if you had several stories to choose from. Then just write!

Don’t worry about the word count so much at first; just start writing.

Then print your paper and circle all the uses of “I.” This will be the pronoun you will need to edit out as much as possible without making the essay sound strange. Notice in the first example, I didn’t even finish the essay, am over the word count and I have 28 uses of “I.”

In the revision, I have only 8 uses of “I.” Notice also the improved diction and the better sense of energy between the two versions.

One night when I was working at Carl’s Jr., my boyfriend and I were having a break in the manager’s office. The closing crew always worked unsupervised late at night. There were no customers. We were about to close. Soon another employee, Diane, slid open the door and we saw her lying on the floor. She whispered, “We’re being robbed.” At first, David said, “Oh, get off the floor.” But she insisted, adding that he has a gun and ordered everyone to get on the floor. Then, she started to cry. I walked quietly down the hallway toward the work area behind the counter. Between a prep counter and shelving, I could see a man in dark clothing holding the cashier from behind. I looked back into the office and David was on the phone, I would assume speaking to the police. Since the robber did not know I was there, I slipped out the side door to the dining room and headed to the back door. I figured since the danger was inside the restaurant, safety would be outside of it. I went through the dining room toward the back emergency exit. Completely undetected by anyone, I rushed to the door but then noticed the notation on the arm: Emergency Exit Only. Oh dear. What might that mean? I had never asked about using a door that no one ever used. I thought perhaps an alarm might sound and if that happened, I worried about what a person with a gun might do. I worried that he might panic and hurt someone. Knowing I had no power to do anything about what was happening in the front of the restaurant, I resolved at least to remain in the restaurant so I didn’t make problems worse. I hid in the bathroom and I listened carefully for any sounds that would propel me out that emergency exit. I heard nothing. Eventually, my boyfriend knocked on the bathroom door and told me that the robber had gone. He had just robber Burger King to our east and headed off to the liquor store to the west. I never found out if he got caught. I figured the police must have gotten many calls from that stretch of street. I hope they caught him.

381 words

Here is the revision for the first draft:

One night while working the closing shift at Carl’s Jr., my boyfriend and I were having a private break together in the manager’s office; no bosses ever stayed for the closing process. Soon another employee, Diane, slid open the door and, lying on the floor, she whispered, “We’re being robbed.” At first, David said, “Oh, get off the floor”; closing shift often pranked each other. But she tearfully added that he has a gun and ordered everyone to get on the floor. I walked quietly down the hallway toward the work area behind the counter. A man in dark clothing stood behind the cashier. David was already on the phone, presumably speaking to the police. Having been unnoticed, I slipped out into the dining room and headed to the back exit. Since the danger was inside the restaurant and safety awaited outside, I sneaked quickly toward the door but then read the notice: Emergency Exit Only eliminated in red light. Oh dear. What might that actually mean? No one ever used that door, talked about the door or explained the door’s proper use. What if an alarm sounds? What if the thief panics and hurts someone?

Feeling powerless to help my frightened friends lying on the floor, the least that could be done was not endanger them further. With no heroic ideas coming to mind, I chose to hide in the bathroom and listen carefully for anything that might propel me out that back door, alarm or not. Eventually, David came to fetch me and said the robber had gone. No one had been hurt. The thief had just robbed Burger King to our east and then headed off to the liquor store to the west. Luckily, David had called them, too, so they had locked their doors. I never found out if the criminal got caught and I never told my parents; they would have made me quit. Though regrettably not as brave or resourceful as David, it did please me somewhat to learn that I could remain calm in an emergency.

343 words