Some Writing Advice

(from a person who has made all the mistakes you might make and more)

1. Simple does it.
2. Be specific. Be personal. Be curious. Be courageous.
3. Word choice:
   1. Do not use generalizations, generic examples/metaphors. Avoid adverbs. Avoid vague adjectives such as interesting, wonderful, beautiful, horrible, etc. Keep the language fresh.
   2. Beware of the thesaurus. If you are not entirely sure about the nuances between the words, use the simpler word. Fancier word does not mean fancier essay.
   3. Write like you speak, but not really. Your diction should be balanced throughout the essay. Stay within your vocabulary, or the specific vocabulary necessary for the subject matter.
   4. Present participles should be used carefully and sparingly.
4. Repetition:
   1. Avoid repeating phrases as they will make the new ideas look old.
   2. Avoid repeating ideas, because you are better than that. Push yourself. Go deeper. Complicate the issue.
   3. Avoid rewriting the same idea in two different sentences. You’ll do this as you are trying to figure out what exactly you want to say. Ask yourself: “What is this sentence doing?” If it is doing the same thing as the previous sentence, cut one.
   4. Avoid retelling the story. Use what you need from the text, but do not summarize the whole thing.
5. Structure:
   1. No, you do not need an introduction. Ask yourself: “Why exactly do I need this paragraph?” If it is there only because you were still warming up, cut it.
   2. Group ideas into paragraphs. You are not James Joyce. Your entire paper should not be one single paragraph.
   3. Pay attention to transition. Ideally, one paragraph should lead into the next. If not, do not resort to words such as, thus, however, overall, etc. No transition is better than cheap transition.
   4. No fast, unexplored, universal conclusions. Do not repeat what you said in the beginning in the end.
6. Content:
   1. What is the point of your essay? You do not need to write this in the essay, but you must know it as you write everything else.
   2. Explain your logic to your reader. We are not you, we will not know how *you* went from point A to point B.
   3. No shortcuts or relying on generalizations. Articulate, and say exactly what you want to say.
7. Before you submit: Imagine you read your essay to a close friend or a family member. Did you cringe? Did you want to laugh off certain passages? If you said yes to either of these questions, revise. Produce work that you are proud of.
8. What do these mean?
   1. WC: Word choice
   2. SP: Spelling
   3. ¶: New paragraph
   4. Rework: Rewrite the sentence, using what’s already there, making it tighter, cleaner.
   5. Redo: Delete what’s already there, and try to say the same thing in different words.
   6. Not sure: Something here is not working. Cut or rewrite.
9. Grading: (Primarily based on the grasp of the text/issue, the originality of ideas, the depth of discussion, and the command of language.)
   1. F means F.
   2. D means the paper is not organized, arguments are faulty and/or not developed, there is a lot of repetition, the ideas are not original, the discussion does not show any depth and/or serious consideration of the issues at hand, command of language is poor, it is confusing and gets in the way of the reader.
   3. C means the paper is somewhat organized, but the arguments are not well developed, the discussion is flat, unoriginal, or everything is muddied by hasty language, and it’s hard for the reader to understand.
   4. B means the paper is fairly well organized, the arguments are solid if not interesting, the language could be tighter/cleaner.
   5. A means there is no room for improvement. I am grateful for having read a great paper, and probably already talked about your essay to my writer/teacher friends because it was so good.
10. Don’t forget: “Search into the depth of Things.” Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*