Sample Module
Below is a screen capture from the CTools Module entitled “Being Specific, Definite, and Concrete.” In Modules, images and video were sometimes used to illustrate key concepts. The concept being highlighted in this case is using concrete language to create “word pictures.”

Sample Student Response
After reading the whole module, students were asked to complete a related assignment, in which they revised a sentence and a paragraph from the draft of their first essay. Below is an example of one student’s original work and her revision.

In the sentence revision, at the top of the text box, the student altered her first sentence to make it more formal (“fed up” → “had no interest”) and adds details to explain why she did not want to work on her writing. In the paragraph revision, the student created a paragraph-long “word picture” based on a single sentence in her original essay.
Additional examples
Here are some additional student responses to the same assignment, to rewrite a sentence from their first essay to increase its specificity and concreteness.

• Some students used more specific words to elaborate ideas. For example, Student 2 changed “experiences” to “made judgments about, and consequently how I would interact.

• Other students made their language more concrete. For example, Student 4, changes an adjective—“chaotic”—to concrete verbs that depict the chaos: “the crowd yelled and shouted at the actors on the stage.”

Both elaboration of ideas and vividness of language are often lacking in first-year college writers’ essays.

Student 2

Original: I was supposed to look at how my own ideas, background, and experiences would shape my experiences as a Resident Advisor, namely my interactions with residents.

Revision: I was supposed to look at how my personal beliefs - about religion, gender, equality, politics, class, and sexism - my background - where I grew up, my parents' income, where I went to school - and my all of my life experiences would affect how I made judgments about, and consequently how I would interact with, my residents.

Student 3

Original: I have learned to appreciate personal statements because they help me explain myself.

Revision: After being given the chance to explain my actions to professors and GSI's here at Michigan, I learned to appreciate personal statements and now use them as a tool to allow my voice to be heard in situations where I would usually remain silent.

Student 4

Original: Among the chaotic crowd, a grave face showed up for a moment and then quickly disappeared.

Revision: The crowd yelled and shouted at the actors on the stage, but a tall man in his long black cape was an exception to them—grave-faced, he stood on the square for a moment, and then quickly disappeared in the sea of waving hands.

Student 5

Original: When I started reading the book, I knew I was in for a boring time.

Revision: As I began to read the book, I felt as if I was tied to a chair and forced to watch paint slowly dry. The cringe in my face as I read sentence after sentence was unbearable, boredom easily set in.

Student 6

Original: Since I was quite good at English in Korea, I had confidence and was not afraid of getting used to the life in the U.S.

Revision: I am not a math or science person. When I was in high school, while getting B’s on other subjects, I have made A’s on English. Moreover, on the university entrance exam, my English test score was higher than other sections. That was the factors that I had confidence and was not afraid of getting used to the life in the U.S.