

30 More Prompts and Sample College Essays

College Essay Example #1/30: Harvard

Prompt: The Harvard College Honor code declares that we "hold honesty as the foundation of our community." As you consider entering this community that is committed to honesty, please reflect on a time when you or someone you observed had to make a choice about whether to act with integrity and honesty. (650 words)

"I sit in a hot SUV winding its way over a bumpy African road, a scarf protecting my nose and mouth as dust streams in through the window. Returning from a teaching session with the Maasai women, the other students' excited chatter dances around me as they discuss our invitation to the Maasai coming of age ceremony. The ceremony centers on the circumcision of pubescent males and females; often performed with a sharp rock and no anesthetic. It is a rite of passage for the Maasai. My stomach is a tight knot, picturing the children we met today and imagining the painful procedure they will soon undergo. The other students, excited about the feast and intricate costumes, hope that accepting the invitation will strengthen our bond with the community. I, however, am weighed down by a profound sense of unease when it comes to the main attraction: the circumcisions. Further, the leader of the organization is absent; should she not be consulted? Do I go along with the group, and participate in something that I am morally opposed to? Or do something about it?

For me, the strength of a person's character is defined by their ability to act on their values and stand up for what they believe in. Having strong moral values only becomes a powerful agent of change when one is willing to follow through on them with action. Situations, such as this one, where I feel a sinking sensation deep in my gut, help to cue me to conflicts with my own values, prompting me to gather more information, thus taking the first step towards informed action.

In this situation, the knots in my stomach came from being asked to participate in the celebration of female genital mutilation; a practice which is decidedly against my personal values of reducing human suffering and promoting women's rights. My visceral reaction came specifically from the idea of watching while doing nothing to intervene. Further, I worried that, as students, our group would be woefully ill-equipped to navigate the nuances of the situation, potentially resulting in harm to our relationship with the

community. Plus, due to our association with a medical organization, our presence could be mis-interpreted as an endorsement of the safety of these procedures. With the potential to do harm and without an actionable plan in place for stopping genital mutilation, I concluded that I could not, in good conscience, attend the ceremony.

Though I had decided that I could not go, I still felt concerned about the potential impact of the group's attendance and wanted to gain more insight into the situation before deciding on a course of action. I shared my concerns with my partner and another student. My partner agreed with me, and we decided to consult his physician father. We quickly learned that Canadian physicians are not legally permitted to condone female genital mutilation, meaning that our attending the ceremony could have legal ramifications for our physician-run organization. With this information in hand, I knew I had to contact the organization lead about the excursion. She forbade our group from attending, requesting that I inform the other students, who were obviously disappointed that I had 'gotten the trip cancelled'.

Though I believe my course of action was the right one and I would not change the outcome, looking back, I wish I had voiced my concerns earlier; it may have made the end result easier for the other students to swallow. In spite of this, being honest when expressing my discomfort with a situation and choosing an alternative course of action that is aligned with my values has never led me to make a decision that I regret. Though standing up for what you believe in, and doing what is right, is not always easy, it is always worth it, and arguably the only way of living a life without regrets."

College Essay Example #2/30

Prompt: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

When I was a child, I loved to play Pokémon video games. My favorite part was moving between locations on my map and collecting all the Pokémon, one by one!. Around the same time, I entered Boy Scouts and got engrossed in the idea of earning merit badges. Each badge could be earned by learning about a topic or a challenge and then doing a series of projects related to it. From fishing to first aid, I quickly found that I loved learning about each new task and collecting badges, much like Pokémon. In my first year in Scouts, I earned double the required number of badges, and it took off from

there. My love of collecting trophies was once again reignited; in games and the real world.

In Boy Scouts, I had set my mind on earning every merit badge, so I had to tell my parents and my troop. My parents were on board instantly, but my troop took some convincing. Many of them said that it would take too much time; that I'd have to travel to different states for some badges like the snow sports merit badge, or that I'd have to build up the endurance to bike for 50 miles at one time for the bicycling merit badge. I told them that I was eager to do this and that I needed their help to find where the badges were being taught. They chuckled and let me have access to the citywide list. Over the next six years I hiked up mountains, swam across rivers, and camped outside with nothing but a long jacket. As I kept going, my troop's attitude slowly turned from apprehensive to encouraging. Members of the community started popping up to teach some of the more obscure merit badges like atomic energy and bugling. Word of what we were doing spread throughout the local scouting community and other scouts started joining our mission when someone offered one of the uncommon badges. There was a little boy who must have weighed 80 pounds when he took the computer merit badge with me, and last time we talked, he had been offered a job at Google.

A scout must collect all the badges before his 18th birthday. With the strength of the community behind me, I was able to get my final merit badge a month before my 18th birthday – right before I had to sit for my final interview for the Eagle Scout badge. During that interview, the scout leader asked if I had completed every single merit badge. When I confirmed, he informed me that I had broken a new world record as the first Boy Scout in history to earn every merit badge before earning my Eagle! As he stood up and shook my hand, I was overcome with gratitude for everyone who had gotten me to this point. Every late night with my parents, every merit badge counselor, every teacher, every fellow scout, and every scout leader who helped me achieve that goal. This was about so much more than one scout. This was about a community coming together to make history. Even though this was a few years ago, I look back fondly on all the people who made it happen, and today I am a merit badge counselor myself working to give back to scouting more than what it has given me, even though that might take a while.

College Essay Example #3/30

Prompt: Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find, so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

I have always been fascinated by history: the rise and fall of empires, the evolution of humanity, innovation, politics, and everything else that made us who we are today. What amazes me so much about history are the moments when everything could have gone differently had it not been for one decision: what if Lincoln was never elected? What if the French Revolution never took place? What if the Magna Carta was never signed?

My love of history likely started in middle school with Mr. Flickerson. He was a very thin, tall man with a giant white mustache who always wore a tweed jacket. He was our history teacher, and he always claimed that books didn't always have everything right. Mr. Flickerson often encouraged us to do our own research and see what else we could find on a topic of interest. If someone could find something from a reputable source that disagreed with the textbook, we got five bonus points on a test.

I still remember how excitedly he recounted old battles. He would do gruff voices for generals and deftly switch to a hilarious high-pitched voice for the ladies. His passion for history greatly affected his students, and by the end of the year, we were shooting history reenactment videos in full costume. Since then, history has always held a special place in my heart.

Now when I exercise, half of my podcasts are all history related. I remember once getting so engrossed in a podcast about Genghis Khan that I stayed at the gym for three hours! On the one hand, he was a vicious warrior and tyrant, but he was also an innovator and loyal leader. He allowed women to serve in leadership positions. He even promoted freedom of religion. There are many stories of him eating on the ground or from an old wooden bowl while his guests dined using the fine silver.

From history, we can learn a lot about the complexities of humanity. We can see how people in the past dealt with issues and what their results were. In its way, history sheds light on our present and future.

College Essay Example #4/30

Prompt: The mission of Harvard College is to educate our students to be citizens and citizen-leaders for society. What would you do to contribute to the lives of your classmates in advancing this mission? (650 words max)

The phrase “citizen-leader” is important to distinguish from conventional ideas about leadership. Rather than leading by trying to single oneself out among peers, I believe that real leadership comes through effecting palpable change in the lives of those around you. Effective leaders don’t stand apart from their communities, but rather strive to become as deeply rooted within them as possible. A real leader is first and foremost a citizen, a peer, and a support for those around them.

My sense of leadership has been shaped by my father, whose nearly 25 years in public education have positively impacted hundreds of students. Each year he would come home on the last day of a school year with dozens of cards and gifts, from both current students graduating and former students who stopped by to thank him sometimes years after being his students. He was a leader—someone who helped others learn to find themselves, rather than direct their actions or words through conventional authority. I’ve come to believe that power is the ability to encourage people to evolve, and that sustained, successful leadership is measured only by the success and wellbeing of the people around you.

As a result of this understanding, I’ve maintained an active presence in my high school’s peer tutoring program throughout my junior and senior years. Since I also hope to become a teacher, this has provided important experience that helped me better understand the kind of communication and time management skills needed to help people overcome their educational obstacles, specifically regarding their writing skills. The Academic Resource Center’s Peer Tutoring program at Harvard is one of the central ways in which I’d like to help lead my fellow students toward a better understanding not only of rhetoric and composition, but of the world in general.

Coaching in sports is another mode of leadership that I hope to maintain at Harvard. Powerlifting has had a major place in my extracurricular life during high school and I was thrilled to learn that Harvard boasts a competitive powerlifting club. This goes back to the metric of encouraging success and wellbeing of others — the powerlifting club presents an opportunity in which I can further develop these skills along with my fellow barbell enthusiasts. I’ve found strength sport environments to be truly egalitarian and accessible, with a continual emphasis on collaboration and mutual support that’s unique

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among team sports. The path to becoming a more effective leader comes from forging bonds and developing skills alongside other people, so that eventually your ability to lead follows naturally from the experience and abilities you've honed over years of work. By lifting oneself and others up, we eventually pass a threshold into becoming beacons of knowledge, exemplars of ethical and effective action, and citizen-leaders.

This all further galvanizes my desire to teach following my time at Harvard. I feel incredibly fortunate that my current passions in writing and powerlifting will provide opportunities in which I can further develop my leadership skills in a way that will improve my ability to teach them to others. I will strive to continue being a supportive peer and collaborator which is an important foundation for becoming a true leader and educator. Harvard is in every sense the best possible environment for continuing this evolution and encouraging it in my fellow students as well. (556 words)

Note: Write a killer college essay for Harvard by reading some of the best [Harvard supplemental essay examples](#).

College Essay Example #6/30:

School: [Cornell College of Architecture, Art, and Planning](#)

Prompt: What is your "thing"? What energizes you or engages you so deeply that you lose track of time? Everyone has different passions, obsessions, quirks, inspirations. What are yours? (650 words)

It's 4 a.m. and I'm bent over my computer screen. In front of me is one of the photographs I intend to submit for the Charles Lewin Digital Photo Essay Competition. It is a silhouette shot of a tall, smiling woman – my mother – framed against the backdrop of a gorgeous red sunset. Though I'd used the whip-pan technique to give the photo the same dynamic, inspiring, whirlwind energy I associate with my mother, it's not quite right. I've been fiddling with the white balance and color pallet for hours, trying to capture the perfect amount of luminosity in my mother's eyes. At that moment, my mother herself comes in, asking why I'm up so late on a school night. When I show her the picture, her eyes light up in exactly the way I've captured in the photo. That photo essay, capturing the beauty of three generations of women in my family, went on to win me first place in the competition. And yet the moment that I shall carry with me forever

is the one from 4 a.m. that night. The moment when my mother's eyes lit up in joy and wonder as she understood exactly what I was trying to say through my photography. In that moment, I knew for sure that I'd be chasing this feeling for the rest of my life.

Though that moment cemented my love for photography, I've been playing around with a camera since I was 5 years old, when my father first introduced me to his favorite hobby. I was a shy, quiet kid and photography allowed me to experience the world and communicate my feelings like I never could before. Most of our weekends were spent taking pictures, from micro nature photography on our camping trips to event photography for every community event. Even back then, I was constantly asking questions about why one picture looks better than another. I credit my father for helping me develop my photographic "eye". The training of those early years helped me develop my sense of aesthetic placements, framing, and positioning.

To this day, I am obsessed with learning about the technical side of photography. I have a natural analytical bent of mind that exists along-side my artistic vision; and so, I gravitate towards understanding exactly how aperture, depth of field, shutter speed, exposure, composition, and white balance can be used as a tool of artistic control in photography. My favorite way to unwind is to read books and online articles about photography and techniques I'm currently obsessed with. I also love experimenting with different styles of photography. Though art photography is my passion, I spent a couple of years as the staff photographer for my high school newspaper. This foray into the journalistic arena helped to broaden my horizons and consider the social impact of photography.

Lately, I've become passionately interested in the philosophy and psychology of photography. There are two books that inspired this journey - "The Art of Photography" by Bruce Barnbaum and "Studio Anywhere" by Nick Fancher. These books led me to think deeply about the artistic merit and social impact of photography and inspired me to sign up as a volunteer photographer at the local community center. I remember when an older lady, a little self-conscious about her appearance, asked me to take a photo of her in her evening dress at a fund-raising event. When I showed her the photo I took, her expression transformed from anxiety and discomfort to pride and confidence, just like my mother on that fateful Tuesday night. That's another moment of joy I'll carry with me forever.

Alfred Stieglitz once said - "In photography there is a reality so subtle that it becomes more real than reality." Every photographer has a vision of their own reality and the greatest joy I feel is when I successfully communicate this philosophy using my work.
(648 words)

College Essay Example #7/30:

School: [Cornell College of Arts and Sciences](#)

Prompt: Students in Arts and Sciences embrace the opportunity to delve into multifaceted academic interests, embodying in 21st century terms Ezra Cornell’s “any person...any study” founding vision. Tell us about the areas of study you are excited to explore, and specifically why you wish to pursue them in our College. (650 words)

Growing up, I was your average troublesome kid. I rarely turned in homework on time, I frequently landed in detention, and I preferred video games to any other activity. This was me until the age of 14 – and that was when it all changed, thanks to Mr. Robert Brown. I was placed in Mr. Brown’s English Literature class in freshman year. Mr. Brown believed that every student could become interested in English Literature, given the right bait, and for me the bait was science fiction novels. He identified my nascent inclination towards science-based, fantasy worlds, based on my interest in video games, and handed me some choice works by Isaac Asimov, Ursula Le Guin, and Frank Herbert. In a matter of days, I was hooked.

Looking back, I can appreciate how deeply transformative that period of my life was. Science fiction fulfilled all my natural inclinations towards an exploration of imagination and wonder within the limits of a rule-bound world. At the same time, it awoke in me a deep and abiding interest in larger questions of philosophy, sociology, technology, and ethics. I had a new-found love for not only English Literature, but also Physics, Biology, Chemistry, and Math and my overall grades improved tremendously. I often took up projects for extra credit just so I could explore a particular new topic I was obsessed with. Specifically, I loved to take up parallel projects in different classes since I loved exploring two different sides of the same essential question. For instance, in my sophomore year, I wrote a paper on Darwinian Evolution in Mid-Century American Fiction for my English Literature class, while also working on an extra-credit class presentation on the Darwin’s Theory of Evolution for Biology. This kind of dual-natured exploration of topics is something I want to pursue throughout my life.

Over time, my interest in the fictional explorations of socio-scientific questions expanded to the real world. I developed an interest in biotechnology innovations such as gene-therapy, drug engineering, and agricultural biotechnology and I even started a YouTube

channel to provide commentary on the latest scientific news. My scientific interests led me to real-world activism in my junior year when a biotechnology company came to our town to offer “free” genetic sequencing for the population. I organized an informational campaign highlighting their lax privacy and data protection terms. Thanks to our efforts, the company revised their terms to ensure greater privacy for the genetic information of all participants.

This experience sparked my interest in medical ethics as a career and I am now actively seeking an education that will allow me to pursue both the scientific and philosophical questions related to technology, society, and ethical limitations. I believe the Science & Technology Studies major at the Cornell College of Arts and Sciences offers a unique opportunity to pursue the holistic, balanced education I seek.

Though I know what I eventually want to major in, it is also particularly important to me to continue building my knowledge base in both humanities and sciences, before declaring my major. The holistic, balanced curriculum at your school allows me this freedom. At Cornell, I will have the chance to acquire philosophy AND biology mentors, interact with students who have varying subject matter interests, and complete an independent research study in any topic of my choosing.

It’s strange to think that just a few years ago, I cared about nothing more than my League of Legends avatar and Minecraft cohorts! And yet, that love for video games was the first step in my journey towards finding answers to the greatest socio-philosophical and scientific questions of our times. I hope Cornell College of Arts and Science can be the next step in that journey. (623)

College Essay Example #8/30: [Princeton](#)

Prompt: At Princeton, we value diverse perspectives and the ability to have respectful dialogue about difficult issues. Share a time when you had a conversation with a person or a group of people about a difficult topic. What insight did you gain, and how would you incorporate that knowledge into your thinking in the future? (250 words)

As captain of my high school basketball team, I have led my team to many hard-earned victories and a few crushing losses. Yet the most difficult moment of my football career took place off the field. It was the morning after our last game of the season, when

Tyler, one of my classmates, approached me to ask for a favor. He said that a group he was a part of called the Hands-On organization were planning a new campaign that they'd love my support with, as captain of the football team – a campaign to request a different school mascot. You see, our school team was called the “Lincoln Indians” and our mascot was a stereotypical representation of an Indian. In our small town located in rural Montana, this has never even been recognized as an issue and initially, I, too, didn't comprehend why it might be one. Tyler took the time to explain to me how it made him feel to see his identity masqueraded as a costume. It was a revelation to me to learn how traumatized he felt at every game. It was a brief conversation which made me re-think a lot of things I had taken for granted; ultimately, I was enlightened and humbled. Thanks to Tyler's efforts, we have a new team mascot. As for me, I am now a member of the Hands-On organization myself, and I want to continue to use my voice to create awareness around the issues affecting minorities in our country. (250)

Note: Colleges may provide a prompt for a [diversity secondary essay](#) to allow applicants to showcase their diversity and unique perspectives. Although you might not think of yourself as “diverse”, everyone can write a diversity essay and boost their chances of acceptance. Explore some [college diversity essay examples](#) to find insight into your own diversity!

If you're planning to apply to Princeton, read some more [Princeton essay examples](#) to get you started!

College Essay Example #9/30:

School: **Princeton University**

Prompt: Princeton has a longstanding commitment to service and civic engagement. Tell us how your story intersects (or will intersect) with these ideals. (250 words)

I was 14 when I met Jennifer at the local Literacy Volunteers and Advocates (LVA) chapter. At this time, I was going through the basic motions of volunteering without truly understanding the impact or significance of what I was doing. Jennifer was an immigrant from Mexico and attended my computer literacy class at LVA. She was one of the few new immigrants who could speak English fluently, and so she served as the unofficial translator at our LVA center. Once, I asked her if she didn't find it annoying to always have to leave her own tasks and go running off to translate for other people. She told me that for her, it was a privilege to be able to do this for others and the biggest annoyances were the authority figures who displayed impatience, discrimination, and cruelty towards immigrants. Her words had a lasting impact on me and from that moment, I saw so many instances of inequity, cruelty, and injustice that I had not even registered before. At the same time, I recognized the potential I had to make a real difference in people's lives. I decided to take on a full-time Spanish tutor and in a couple of years, I was near-fluent in Spanish. My life's goal is to continue practicing my Spanish language skills through my undergraduate education and to eventually enact provisions in politics and society to counter the language barrier that so many immigrants face.

(241)

College Essay Example #10/30: [Stanford](#)

Prompt: The Stanford community is deeply curious and driven to learn in and out of the classroom. Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning. (100-250 words)

*I have always enjoyed my English Literature classes and Mrs. Sutherland's junior year Lit class was no different. Our assigned reading was *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. It was my first Austen novel, and in fact, it was the first classic novel I had read from that historical period. I knew I'd enjoy the romantic story of the novel; what I didn't expect was how the social structure of the novel would grip me as I deep dived into it for our class. When Mrs. Sutherland gave us the freedom to write our English Lit finals paper about any topic, I chose to write about the social fabric of the Regency era. I was fascinated by how the Regency-era economic and military events formed the backdrop for Jane Austen's social realism. This paper sparked my interest in social history as a field of study, and subsequently, I read as many books as I could about the social, cultural, and economic history of England. Each new topic I read about made me reflect on how social mores and day-to-day social rituals are formed because of the major*

economic, military, and business events of the time. That one semester of English Literature introduced me to a whole new world of learning, questioning, and debating, and eventually helped me define what I wish to study in college. Thank you, Mrs. Sutherland! (230)

College Essay Example #11/30:

School: **Stanford University**

Prompt: Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—get to know you better. (100-250 words)

Dear future roommate,

The number one thing you should know about me is that I live in a state of organized chaos, both in my mind and outside it. For example, I love learning about new topics and my favorite way to learn is to read as much as I can while drinking copious cups of tea. Prepare to often see large piles of books about my latest hyper-obsession lying around!

Yes, I still like checking physical books out of the library rather than downloading digital copies – that's another one of my quirks. While I'm open to learning and I enjoy new experiences, I also like the comfort and stability of tradition. In fact, I am also a very traditional student. For me, learning is not just about classes and homework and assignments. I like to bring my learning home with me, and to talk about topics that sparked my interest with my friends.

For example, yesterday in AP Biology, we learned about invasive species and their impact on ecology. This got me thinking about how human beings could, in our current form, be considered an invasive species, and I later had an interesting conversation with my friend about whether natural corrections could already be occurring in response.

Along with my piles of books, you can expect me to bring home many ideas, experiences, and speculations to discuss with you, maybe over a cup of tea! (236)

College Essay Example #12/30:

School: **Stanford University**

Prompt: Tell us about something that is meaningful to you, and why? (100-250 words)

I am a passionate advocate for universal healthcare and specifically, equitable, and non-discriminatory access to healthcare for people of all communities. One of my goals in pursuing an education in medicine combined with public health policy is to take tangible actions towards my beliefs.

Growing up, my family and I never considered “going to the hospital” an option. My parents both had minimum wage jobs with no benefits. Without health insurance, without coverage, healthcare was, to us, a luxury. If we were seriously injured or ill, we would call on “unofficial” doctors – a friendly nurse, a local vet, or the knowledgeable pharmacist who lived above us. I remember when I was 12, my mother, who at the time had an undiagnosed diabetic condition, went into insulin shock, and almost died. Riding to the hospital in the ambulance, I could see that even in that moment, my father couldn’t purely worry about his wife’s life; he also had to worry about the medical bills he’d be stuck with, even if she lived.

My mother survived, and so did our family, but the suffering of that time still lives with me. It informs my desire to be the best possible doctor I can be, serving communities that need my help. And it’s why my greatest ambition is to one day be able to implement effective policies that address the imbalances in our healthcare system. (234)

Is Stanford your #1 choice? Get ready for supplemental applications and read some [Stanford essay examples!](#)

College Essay Example #13/30:

School: **Stanford University**

Prompt: Tell us about something that is meaningful to you, and why? (Max 250 words)

Cold water splashed my exposed calves as I helped pull the rubber dingy safely to shore. I kept thinking about the line of a poem by Warshan Shire: “no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.” I noted that there were more than 15 small children in the boat. My family and I had been vacationing on a Greek island when we heard cries coming from the sea. We rushed to help and with the aid of locals, we pulled the boat to shore. Luckily everyone survived. A few of those on the boat spoke English; they explained that they were refugees and had fled conflict in Syria. Until that point in my life the concept of a refugee was opaque. Now I understood in a visceral way what it meant to flee one’s country.

Since this trip one year ago, I have devoted most of my extracurricular hours to a local NGO that helps to resettle refugees. I have convinced many friends to join me as a “buddy” to incoming refugees. We teach each other about our cultures by cooking together, sharing stories, and exploring nature. The more I learn about other cultures, the more I realize that I have much more to learn. What I now know is that is my duty to advocate for those who do not have the power to advocate for themselves and to fight for the rights of those at home and abroad. (248 words)

College Essay Example #14/30:

Prompt: Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you’ve already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

As a child, I was considered the “fat” kid. I grew much faster than any of my peers and was over a foot taller than every other person in my 5th-grade class. With that speedy growth came a lot of eating and I tended to be overweight for most of my childhood. However, by the start of grade 7, I started to lean out and at the end that year I was finally “in shape.” This new status and change in my appearance led to major changes in most of my relationships: it was easier to make friends, teachers treated me better, and I was picked first for sports teams. Everything seemed to improve. Yet, I remembered what it had been like to be an “outsider” and suffer humiliation for my appearance and weight.

I learned to appreciate the power of humor very early on in my life. Initially, when a classmate went on about how giant or stupid I was, I could not stand up for myself. It was painful and infuriating, but I took the abuse quietly. However, once I learned that I

shouldn't take myself and my appearance too seriously, I was able to make fun of myself too. This change in my attitude was life-altering. My classmates' taunts didn't hurt anymore and most of my peers did not want to bully someone who reacted to their abuse with laughter. As the years went on, I would hone this ability, always ready to deflect mean words with a quick joke or a clever comment. I even started using it to swing in and save other outsiders like me. The key was to distract the bully long enough to escape or to get the bully to start laughing, perhaps even turning them into friends. Once I dropped the weight and became conventionally "normal", I never forgot what it was like to be different. Since then, I have always worked to include everyone. Inclusion has become a priority to me, as I do not want anyone to experience what I did. A kind word or a quick joke makes strangers feel like friends and speaking from experience, sometimes that's all we need.

Children can be brutally honest. If they see something different than what they are used to, they have no problem pointing it out. As an adult, this is an endearing trait to see in children, but as a fellow kid, it was difficult to endure. Growing up is hard for everyone, but it is especially rough for people who are different. One of my best friends as a child was a kind girl from Spain whose family always made very fragrant foods. Other children mocked the smell of her lunches, but I was always friendly, and we often enjoyed her delicious lunches together. Together, our respective challenges did not seem so severe.

Growing up as an outsider taught me a lot. Negative experiences are also valuable: knowing what it's like to be made fun of and excluded teaches you the value of friendship and companionship. I didn't know it at the time, but hardships can be helpful gifts. The spice of life is variety. If everyone looked, acted, and thought the same, we'd have such a boring world. But instead, we have artists, craftsmen, philosophers, and writers - people who change the world through their uniqueness.

College Essay Example #15/30: [University of Pennsylvania](#)

Prompt: How did you discover your intellectual and academic interests, and how will you explore them at the University of Pennsylvania? (300-450 words)

Realizing how infinitely fascinating biology could be is a memory steeped in the peculiar odor of formaldehyde. My tiny hand, 9 years old and perpetually snack-sticky enough to leave fingerprints on the glass, reached out and lightly rested on the jar holding what I

then called “monster hands.” In reality, this was an impeccably preserved pair of hands from a gout sufferer, one of the thousands of wet specimens in Philadelphia’s Mutter Museum, a place I didn’t know existed prior to my first visit but have not forgotten since.

Though the sight was unusual, I wasn’t scared by this display at all. My parents have since told me that I was overcome with fascination in that moment, genuinely transfixed by what surrounded me. My now-hazy recollection is one of wonder, and a feeling I couldn’t quite describe at the time but now understand to be empathy. “Was he sore?” I asked my parents. My mother laughed and my father calmly tried to explain, in toddler terms, just how much pain this person suffered.

This planted a seed that has since matured into a profound appreciation for the complexity of living systems. And, in more somber terms, a sensitivity to how these systems can short-circuit and create a domino effect of dysfunction that results in everything from uric acid crystals in knuckles to conjoined twins. I’ve since tempered my childhood fascination with more extreme medical conditions, but I can still see, feel, and smell that room in the Mutter. Strange as it may be my lifelong obsession with medicine and biology comes out of this oddity-packed room, its vaguely astringent air, and impossibly large intestine sitting halfway up the stairs.

Penn’s Musculoskeletal Center is therefore one of the biggest reasons for my application for admission. The center’s current research in both ossification disorders and tissue engineering is incredibly exciting to me, and while I know participation in high-level research is quite limited for undergraduates, nothing would make me happier than to contribute to the MC’s singular work in some small way. Even more generally, the strength of Penn’s biology department will provide an incredible launching pad for more specialized work in medicine following graduation. (363 words)

College Essay Example #17/30: [Yale University](#)

Prompt: Yale’s extensive course offerings and vibrant conversations beyond the classroom encourage students to follow their developing intellectual interests wherever they lead. Tell us about your engagement with a topic or idea that excites you. Why are you drawn to it? (250 words or fewer)

Art is always a snapshot of a given cultural and artistic moment, but the physicality of this information in pottery has always fascinated me and encouraged me to be both a voracious researcher and experimenter in my own creative practice. Pottery is rightly considered an art, but its underpinnings in chemistry are what have attracted me to this practice and kept me engaged with it over the years. Glazes are endlessly complex, rife with history and a sense of cross-cultural collaboration. In a sense, something as simple as the type of cobalt luster on a Hispano-Moresque plate contains centuries of history, telling stories of resource availability, migration, commerce, and even theology. Yet all of this information must be unlocked through understanding a piece's chemical underpinnings, and specifically the nearly infinite variations in fluxes and ensuing chemical interactions that have shaped—or more accurately, colored—earthenware and stoneware art throughout history.

Yale's Chemistry BS/MS program will be a demanding course of study, but a big part of my extracurricular and personal development involvement throughout it will remain in the molecular magic of pottery. Much the same way surgeons often engage in very dexterity-dependent arts in their downtime, I look forward to continuing my personal explorations in art-oriented chemistry while further developing my academic proficiencies in the science itself. (217 words)

College Essay Example #18/30:

School: [Yale University](#)

Prompt: Yale students, faculty, and alumni engage issues of local, national, and international significance. Discuss an issue that is important to you and how your college experience could help you address it. (250 words or fewer)

Being called “short stack” is probably common for a lot of 5-year-olds, and it certainly didn't bother me throughout my kindergarten year. But just a few years later, I came to understand that I was not only significantly shorter than my friends but was in fact growing at a much slower pace.

I had grown up in a so-called “food desert.” As is the case for most families in these areas, mine rarely had enough money to afford what scarce high-nutrient food we did have access to. This experience has shaped a big part of not only my sense of self but of my desire to pursue a career in policy analysis to help prevent other kids from having

food insufficiencies. Legislation around food and specifically its insufficient supply in poorer areas would therefore be a central focus in my individual research in Yale's Urban Studies program, as well as my graduate and professional work thereafter.

I feel extremely strongly that I have an ethical duty to utilize the privilege afforded to me by an education at Yale to help other kids grow up happier, healthier, and in more self-sufficient communities. (192 words)

Applying to Yale? Here are some [Yale supplemental essays examples!](#)

College Essay Example #19/30: [Columbia University](#)

Prompt: Columbia students take an active role in improving their community, whether in their residence hall, classes or throughout New York City. Their actions, small or large, work to positively impact the lives of others. Share one contribution that you have made to your family, school, friend group or another community that surrounds you. (200 words or fewer)

The biggest impact I've had on my friends and peers was small enough to fit in a shoebox. It started simply: one day in 8th grade, a friend forgot to pack any money, so the rest of us pitched in to buy her lunch. The next day she wanted to pay us back, but I suggested we just stash the \$5 in case any of us forget our lunch money in the future. After a few weeks of saving our spare change, we had enough to move our cache to a small shoebox, which then became our friend group's bank. This caught on quickly, and by ninth grade we began to maintain a class-wide "shoebox bank," available to anyone who needed lunch money or a few dollars for anything else.

By the end of high school, this grew into a formal "leave what you can / take what you need" policy that allowed us to donate \$400 to our city's food bank at the end of the year. I couldn't have done this alone, and so one of the most important things I learned from the success of our shoebox was that a good idea needs community support to succeed. (200 words)

College Essay Example #20/30:

School: [Columbia University](#)

Prompt: Why are you interested in attending Columbia University? (200 words or fewer)

Columbia has long been my magnetic North in the world of American literature. I was an early reader, and became interested in poetry, first the romantics and transcendentalists, then the beats. Tracing the biographies of figures like Kerouac and Ginsburg more recently, I began to realize that they and many other writers whose work had found its way to me spontaneously came with the common thread of Columbia.

*My own poetic practice has therefore been deeply informed by the textures and philosophical milieus which stem from Columbia, and a big part of my desire to matriculate. Professor Arsić's book *On Leaving* was especially transformative, awakening me to a fuller sense of the interrelatedness of so many American writers like Emerson, and galvanizing beyond any doubt the sense that literary studies was my calling. And on a more concrete level, the resources of both the Burke and Butler libraries would play a central part in my proposed thesis, allowing me to fully enmesh my own academic work with the history that has shaped it. (173 words)*

Tip: The “[why this college](#)” is a common essay prompt for admissions. Be sure your reasons for applying are clear and sound. Outline 2 or 3 reasons why you want to attend and what you will bring to the program, especially if you're writing to an Ivy League school! Read some [Columbia essay examples](#) to see what other prompts you can expect.

College Essay Example #21/30:

School: **Columbia University**

Prompt: Please tell us what from your current and past experiences (either academic or personal) attracts you specifically to the areas of study that you noted in the application. (200 words or fewer)

My first visit to a planetarium at the age of 10 infected me with a specific obsession: infinity. The idea of an ever-expanding universe was so thrilling and puzzling to me that I couldn't shake trying to understand it.

For months after my first trip to the Hayden planetarium, I pondered infinity, barely understanding the word itself. This matured into a lasting fascination with number and number theory specifically, and by the time I was in high school I was committed to following this path of knowledge without reservation. The history of number theory formed a prominent part of my elective work as an undergrad, during which I undertook both bibliographic and technical research on Cantor's paradox and "actual infinity" in relation to his lifelong mysticism.

My commitment to mathematics has grown and become much more specialized since my early bedazzlement by cosmology, but the experience of seeing mathematics as a way of thinking beyond conventional scales and frameworks has remained a central part of my love for the discipline ever since. A life spent exploring the outermost reaches of number and logic has been and still is my deepest desire. (191 words)

College Essay Example #22/30: [Brown University](#)

Prompt: Brown's Open Curriculum allows students to explore broadly while also diving deeply into their academic pursuits. Tell us about an academic interest (or interests) that excites you, and how you might use the Open Curriculum to pursue it. (250 words)

Looking through the eyepiece of a microscope, I was amazed to see the individual cells of a sea urchin embryo. In my high school cell and molecular biology class, we were studying the cell cycle and we had the opportunity to harvest embryos from sea urchins to view under the microscope. I had used a microscope before, but only to look at prepared slides containing preserved tissue samples. This was my first time viewing a live sample that I had prepared myself. This experience opened my eyes to the wonders of cell biology and how our scientific world has been expanded with the technology of microscopes. I knew that I wanted to continue to incorporate microscopes into my own learning and to learn as much as I could about cells and their inner workings. With Brown's Open Curriculum, I am excited to broadly study biology while also diving deeply into the world of cell biology. The excitement I felt when looking through the microscope at a sea urchin embryo is one that I look to bring with me to Brown as my classmates

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and I embark on expanding our academic horizons and building the foundation needed to be successful in our future scientific careers.

College Essay Example #23/30:

School: [Brown University](#)

Prompt: Tell us about a place or community you call home. How has it shaped your perspective? (250 words)

When I was a child, I was upset to learn that my parents had decided we would be moving houses. I did not want to leave the place I had called home for the past thirteen years, the place where I had friends and happy childhood memories. Since this period in my life, I have moved several times and now when I think of home, the first thought that comes to mind is my parents. I realized that home is not a specific place; it is the people that surround you that make you feel at home. This perspective allows me to travel to new places and embark on new adventures with the understanding that I can make any place feel like home. The key is building friendships and relationships with those around you so a place does not feel foreign but rather a place in which you feel supported. As I join your community, I look forward to establishing these relationships as my peers and I build a new home at Brown University.

If you're applying to Brown University, be sure to read some more [Brown essay examples!](#)

College Essay Example #24/30:

School: **Tulane University**

Prompt: Please briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences.

My arms began to shake as the bag filled up. Soon it became almost too heavy to manage. Finally, the massive Leatherback Sea Turtle had finished laying her eggs and my team and I could move them to a nursery we had prepared. I was in Costa Rica for an AP class in Tropical Ecology, and we were tasked with saving these eggs from poachers. We brought the eggs to safety and when we returned two months later, we were able to watch as hundreds of baby sea turtles hatched and made it out to sea.

This experience was particularly formative for me. I learned two important lessons. The first is the importance of environmental stewardship. Due to trawling, harvesting for consumption, light pollution and other human factors, many sea turtles are now critically endangered. It will be left to my generation to continue the fight to preserve the natural world. I also learned how inequality can contribute to environmental degradation. The poachers, for example, were working-class families who sold the eggs as aphrodisiacs for \$USD 1-2 to survive. When I heard this, I had to act. By saving the eggs, we may have unintentionally denied these families their means of survival. I therefore, asked my school program if we could brainstorm a solution that would help both the turtles and the locals. We decided to buy their handicrafts at a higher price, to sell them back at home. We also established a yearly fundraiser. To date we have helped transition 10 local families from relying on turtle eggs, to selling handmade items. Through this new partnership with the community, we have also established a cultural exchange, in which a few of our youth spend one month in Costa Rica each year while their youth come to the United States. I hope that this will continue to flourish in the years to come.

With privilege comes responsibility: those of us who have grown up in wealthy societies have largely benefitted from an unequal global system. I believe that it is my duty to use this privilege to help both the world's human and non-human inhabitants.

College Essay Example #25/30: Common App Essays

Prompt: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? (600 words)

I had not lived long, but at that moment, I was sure this was the worst day of my life. I was only eleven years old, and I had to listen to a doctor tell my mother that I would have to inject myself every day for the rest of my life. Being diagnosed with Type I diabetes felt almost like a death sentence; my life changed in an instant, and I was

terrified of not being able to cope with a chronic disease and afraid that I would never get to be a normal child. Little did I know that this condition would later on allow me to give back to my community through my volunteering initiatives and would make me want to pursue a career where I could help others.

The impact that my disease had on my family was profound. We all had to learn to adjust to a new reality, and I went from having a normal life, to having to mature in a matter of weeks. I knew that it was up to me to make this work, but I felt lost and did not know how to deal with this immense responsibility of managing a new diet, an insulin shot four times a day, and my emotions. After a few days, the initial shock was replaced by denial, then came anger, and little by little, I later gained acceptance. By exercising determination and courage, I decided that even though my disease was now a part of my life, I would not let it dictate who I was or what I could become. I was resolute to do great things.

Besides the discipline and resilience that I had to muster to live my life as a diabetic, I realized that some things in life are better dealt with by having a support system. I looked for volunteering positions where I could share my experience with others and listen to their own struggles. After I got involved in different initiatives, I decided to organize a support group in high school for students who were dealing with difficult situations and just needed someone to talk to. The group was so successful that I was invited to other schools to talk about what we did and about the difference we made in our members' lives by just listening to one another. Today, we have more than twenty volunteers, and our meeting times have doubled since we started. Additionally, this group has been a platform for other initiatives that I have helped launch such as fundraising campaigns and mental health events. I do this as I keep looking for ways to get involved in my community and create spaces for people to support one another in difficult times.

We all have challenges in life. Being diagnosed with a chronic disease at such a young age was devastating for me and my family. However, from this experience I have learned that being disciplined is the key to living a healthy life and that being compassionate is the first step to helping those who need it. When I see how many people have benefited from our group, I look back and remember being a scared eleven-year-old, and I feel proud of what I have become. What felt like a death sentence at first turned into a way of supporting others in my community proving that the lessons we take from the obstacles we encounter can, in fact, be fundamental to later success.

Note: Are you applying to any [UC schools](#)? Familiarize yourself with some [UC personal statement samples and prompts](#), since these can be very different from common app prompts!

College Essay Example #26/30:

Common App Essays

Prompt: Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

I distinctly remember the feeling of heat rising in my cheeks as I stared down at my scuffed Converse Chuck Taylors. Somehow, I had landed myself in the principal's office at the beginning of the school year in tenth grade. I blame it on the growth spurt I experienced the summer before that had single-handedly taken half of my wardrobe out of commission. The polka dot dress skimmed the tops of my knees on the first day of high school was now, apparently, so short that it would "distract the young men" in class. Though I respected the rules at my school, I was infuriated, embarrassed, and confused about being made to feel as though I had done something morally wrong because of my height making my skirt length criminally deficient. After sheepishly explaining the situation to my mom, I was relieved to find her just as angry about the school's actions, and even more relieved when she supported my desire to challenge them.

Challenging the school's actions ended up being a little more, well, challenging than I thought. Growing up in a conservative area, my defiance was met with disdain and whispers in the hallway about not knowing my place. Thankfully, however, not all of my peers were so resistant to change. After weeks of emails campaigning the student government's faculty advisor, I was finally permitted to make a presentation about the sexism inherent in the school's dress code before the student government representatives, who grew excited about the potential to change school policy for the better. Collaborating with each grade's representative, we organized a school-wide awareness-raising campaign to engender support for our initiative. At after-school sports practices, band rehearsals, and art club meetings, I pleaded with my peers to realize how antiquated these restrictions on girls' dress were. It was a blatant sexualization of minors' bodies at best and spread the message that male students were not responsible

for their actions when faced with such temptations as exposed kneecaps and bare shoulders. I knew that our school could do better.

Finally, after months of work, my team of advocates and I obtained 1,000 student signatures and 2,000 parent signatures supporting an initiative to reconsider my school's dress code through a gender equity lens. I distinctly remember the heat rising in my cheeks as I stepped up to the podium to address the school board, but this time they were flushed with excitement and pride, not shame or embarrassment. Though I did abide by my mother's censorship of my wardrobe that time—admittedly, scuffed Chuck Taylors did not reflect the gravity of that event—I was so proud to be advocating for gender equity in my school and saving so many of my female peers the trouble of disciplinary action for their bodies being seen. The results of the reconsideration are not yet in, but I learned the power of using my voice for positive social change – something I look forward to continuing in college.

College Essay Example #27/30:

Common App Essays

Prompt: Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Nothing compares to the feeling of the first pass of a pigment-soaked brush on a clean canvas. The first slice into a beautifully iced birthday cake or the powerful print of a first footstep in snow may come close, but I can never lose myself in a sugary confection or icy landscape the way I can when standing at my easel. The thrill I felt as a small child when finger painting never left me, though my technique may have improved a bit.

Technique aside, the value of self-expression through artistic endeavor has only grown for me as I mature. Many find cathartic release through journaling or sharing their thoughts with others in conversation, but I feel most connected to my feelings and the world when I put paint brush to canvas. Not all sentiments can be captured in words, which is where art takes over for me. Just as a piece of music can engender poignant emotions in its listener, a piece of art can make a person feel seen in a large and often lonely world. Nobody knew this better than my middle school art teacher Mrs. Williams. She often let me stay in the studio after school to put continuous rounds of

final touches on my latest masterpiece, knowing that sometimes my piece did not need those additional strokes, but my soul did. A true artist herself, Mrs. Williams understood how art could tell a story and that sometimes the artist's need to tell their story in color and shape was more important than the finished product. Over the years following middle school, I visited Mrs. Williams every once in a while, and each time was always like no time had passed. We would set our easels side by side and paint, sometimes chatting a bit, but often sitting in comfortable silence as we watched colors blend and form new hues with the flick of a paint brush.

In the middle of my junior year of high school, I received the tragic news that Mrs. Williams had suffered a massive heart attack and passed. Devastated and trying to make sense of the first death I had ever experienced, I turned to my mother for advice. "Well, how would you deal with this if Mrs. Williams were here?" she asked me. Of course. I should have known that was the answer to working through my grief. Grabbing my easel and a stool, I set up on the front porch where I could see the sun filtering through the oak leaves in green and yellow shards of glass, smiled at the memory of Mrs. Williams, and began to paint.

College Essay Example #28/30:

Prompt: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

I think by the time we graduate high school, we all fall into the trap of thinking we know ourselves pretty well by now. The truth is, we are only just discovering who we are. And at that point in our lives, we are entering into an incredible period of self-discovery and personal growth. I know I am no exception, and my post-high school years have included some of the most amazing experiences of my life.

Last year was my first opportunity to travel abroad. For someone who rarely strayed more than 100 miles from where they grew up, this was a pretty intimidating choice, but I was excited to travel, to learn about another place and people. For this unique experience, I chose to travel to Japan; a country so unlike my own, I was both excited and worried. Excited for the opportunity, but worried because I speak no Japanese and had never left home before. I wasn't sure what to expect of myself.

After first arriving, everything seemed to be going well, and I had few problems getting around. The locals were friendly and spoke enough English that I had no troubles. Aside from learning to adapt to a new culture, I had no qualms. That is, until I decided to take a bus trip, by myself, into a rural area of the country to do some sightseeing.

I was traveling alone, and all the other bus passengers spoke little English. After we arrived at our destination, I got off the bus and toured around, taking photos and enjoying some lunch. Unfortunately, when I went to catch the bus back to the city, I discovered it was gone. And from what I could gather at the bus stop, there would be no more buses running until the following week, since it was the weekend. Now that I was in a smaller village, there were virtually no English speakers, but I managed to communicate in the limited Japanese I'd learned.

Basically, there were no options for transport back to the city. I could walk down a mountainside throughout the night, or I could wait until Monday to catch the next bus back. Through some creative communication, I managed to get a place to stay for the weekend. The village didn't have an official inn, but the owner of the restaurant where I'd eaten lunch was kind enough to rent me her vacant upstairs room for the two days. Even with her limited English and my poor Japanese, we found a way to make it work. She was even nice enough to invite me to eat with her family that night and give me some suggestions for a hike the next day. When I got on the bus to leave on Monday morning, she waved me goodbye and sent me off with a homemade meal for the journey.

Although the setback I experience seemed at first to confirm my fears that I wouldn't be able to get myself out of a jam, I still managed to sort the problem out, with some help from a kind woman.

If anything, this experience taught me that I am still learning and still growing. It also showed me that I am much more adaptable and resourceful than I give myself credit for. By being open to new experiences and expanding horizons, I can allow myself to expand, too.

My trip taught me some invaluable things about myself, and definitely changed my perspective of who I am. It also taught me the importance of planning ahead and having a backup travel plan!

College Essay Example #29/30:

Prompt: Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

From the time I was in grade school, I thought I was destined to become a scientist. Specifically, I wanted to become a marine biologist. Other students in my class would change their minds from week to week, switching their ideal future careers from doctor to astronaut to musician, never settling on anything and always exploring new possibilities. But I was stuck on marine biology. I was obsessed. Every weekend, I asked to visit the local aquarium.

I imagine my parents were quite pleased with my choice of interest, as they were both scientists themselves. My mother is a molecular biologist, and my father is a neuroscientist and professor. They encouraged my love of science, from bringing me to the aquarium to teaching me to snorkel and scuba dive as I grew up.

In high school, I excelled in the sciences and received high grades. Every academic performance was another step towards my goal of becoming a marine biologist, of being admitted to a good school and focusing on science. But somewhere along the way, my love for science changed. Not diluted, or split, but evolved into something more. Through science, I discovered a love for art. I can't pinpoint exactly when this love began, but it was somewhere in the cool, bluish space of the aquarium observation room. Having spent so many hours there, observing the hundreds of different species, studying their patterns, it's easy to forget that I used to draw sketches of them.

I dug through some old boxes, and as often happens when you're looking through childhood memories, I found something unexpected. Sketchbooks, crammed full of sketches, diagrams and notes of my favorite aquatic species. There were sketches from things I'd seen while scuba diving or visiting the aquarium—fish with colorful stripes and waving fins, coral with intricate patterns and shapes. I was surprised at the details I'd put into the drawings. After showing them to some friends and receiving positive reviews, a friend of mine convinced me to show my drawings in an art show. I'd never considered art as something other than a tool I used in my scientific studies. It never occurred to me that there was an intersection between art and science. An undeniable connection. How could two disciplines, seemingly opposites, come together seamlessly?

The scientist in me was intrigued that there was an existing relationship between the two I had yet to discover. So, I took my friend's advice and let them arrange an art show for me. I selected my best pieces drawn in pencil. Then I went back to visit my favorite aquarium. I brought my tools with me, and I commenced my experiment.

For hours, I sat on the benches, drawing sketches, scribbling notes on color differentiation, environment and behavior. Taking my new sketches home, I started experimenting with an entirely new medium: paint. With some help from my friend, I began learning the techniques and methods to create fully colorful paintings of my favorite marine creatures. The results were surprising and stunning.

By the end of a few weeks, I had dozens of pencil sketches and half a dozen smaller paintings. I'd seen how I could develop an eye for color and use it to capture the exact hues of the creatures I observed. Or how to translate the natural movement of coral and their incredible patterns into flecks of paint. The realism I could create with a few simple things was astounding. I nervously displayed my artwork and waited for my first art exhibition.

The exhibition was a great success, and I even sold some of my paintings. The most notable part of my experience was how it changed my idea of myself. It was surprising and delightful to discover that my passion for science could be expressed so creatively. And that art could understand and capture the beauty of science.

College Essay Example #30/30:

Prompt: Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

I would not say that I am a very grateful person, but recently I experienced something that made me believe cultivating more gratitude in my life is a good thing. For a long time, I've believed that some people are talented, and others are not, and that's just the way things are. And when you have a talent for something, you should use it and deserve to be recognized for it.

As a talented dancer, I hold this mindset deeply ingrained, I think. Dance has always been natural to me. It comes easy and I know I excel at it. I've never failed to impress my teachers. Except for my latest dance teacher. Ms. Martins is a new addition to my

dance club, and she is known for being strict and having high standards, like many dance teachers. As I have high standards myself, I expected we would get along just fine.

To my surprise, we did not. Every class, she would provide who I considered to be weaker students with plenty of encouragement. For me, she had only critiques. One of her favorite comments was that I wasn't pushing myself far enough. Of course, this attitude aggravated me and created some resentment.

I finally confronted her when she passed me over for a lead spot in the club's upcoming production. I asked her why she wouldn't put her best student in the lead role. Her reply shocked me. She said that while I may be her best student, I wasn't her strongest. When I asked what she meant, she remarked that I would never grow as a dancer if I kept coasting on my natural talent and stopped challenging myself.

Determined to prove her wrong, I promised to challenge myself. At the next internal club showcase, I performed a difficult dance in front of my classmates and the faculty, including Ms. Martins. She complimented me on my performance but remarked that I hadn't truly challenged myself. She suggested I try a dance I wasn't familiar with or try dancing in a new discipline to see if I could translate my skills across dance styles.

With renewed vigor, I did as she suggested, and attended a class on hip-hop, instead of my specialty of ballet. Ballet is considered extremely rigorous, despite its appearance, but I learned in a hip-hop class, it takes more than talent to succeed. I had never struggled so much in my life to perform a dance properly. Being the stubborn sort of person I am, I didn't throw in the towel and instead went back for another class, then another.

The next time I had the chance to perform in front of Ms. Martins, I chose a hip-hop routine. It was far from my best dance performance, but it felt surprisingly satisfying to see her smile in the audience. I was even more surprised to hear her say that she was impressed after my performance.

What was even more baffling to me was that I felt a surge of gratitude for Ms. Martins for convincing me to push my boundaries and work outside my discipline. When I was able to learn a new style, it gave me a sense of satisfaction that I could still excel outside my preference. When I performed my next ballet routine and found I'd even incorporated some of the lessons I'd learned in hip-hop class into my ballet, I couldn't believe it, but I wanted to thank Ms. Martins for what she did.

Without her, I might never have pushed my boundaries. I might never have discovered that I could go beyond my best performance. Her push for me to challenge myself has made me realize that its important to keep challenging myself and growing in my skill. That I had grown complacent, and it was in fact affecting my passion for dance. Somehow though, my gratitude to my teacher has reignited the spark of passion for dance and encouraged me to never grow complacent again.

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