Today's Schedule

- Round 1
  - Essay Writing Introduction (10 minutes)
  - UC Prompt Practicing (10 minutes)
  - Writing / Brainstorming Exercise (10 minutes)
  - UC Prompt in Detail (10 minutes)
- Round 2
  - Continue UC Prompt in detail (15 minutes)
  - Practicing Round 2 (20 minutes)
  - Common Essay and Other Essay (Supplemental) (15 minutes)
  - Essay Examples (5 minutes)

Why are essays important?

- Allows the reader to see who YOU are as the PERSON, not just the number.
- Essays are specific to you, not the college you are applying to.
- Important to learn how to articulate thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc.
- YOU are completely in charge of your essays! Grades and SAT/ACT scores
  are not going to change much by the time you apply to college.
- Interested in transferring? Still have to submit essays...
UC Personal Insight Questions, Common Application, and Other Essays

- Your college essays are an opportunity for you to let readers of your application get past the numbers, scores, grades, and boxes to check off on the application to see a glimpse of you and get a view about your life, views and experiences.

- Note about:

  - What do I have to offer?
  - Start with three things that is unique about you that they can't see from my resume, grades or test scores.

UC Personal Insight Questions, Common Application, and Other Essays

- Be AUTHENTIC AND BE HONEST. This is not necessarily confessional, but you do have to come up with topics of significance. You also need to have a cohesive narrative, your story needs a beginning, middle, and end.

- That brainstorming and thinking of multiple topics and don't throw any away. You may think something is a bad idea now but it may serve another purpose or be able to be incorporated in another way.

- DO NOT delete any drafts. Label them and save them all in a folder titled "College Essay." You may write something on a previous draft that you really like or want to have back if you delete it later. Just in case.

What you need to know: UC Personal Insight Question

- Applicants must select 1 question to respond to from the 8 options.
- Each response has a limit of 300 words.
- Students must respond to more than 1 question in some cases cannot use additional comment box to respond to more questions.

- All questions are equal. All are given equal consideration in the application review process, which means there is no advantage or disadvantage to choosing certain questions over others.

- There is no right or wrong way to answer these questions. It's about getting to know your personality, background, interests, and achievements in your own unique voice.

- See preparation tip and prompt.
UC Personal Insight Video

http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/index.html

Time to prewrite!

Quick write for 2 minutes for each UC prompt

Writing Exercises and Brainstorming

- If you really knew me... to whom
- Values List
- Four Ways I've been Challenged in My Life
- True Feelings and Needs Exercise
- Exercises to do on your own: How Do I Read, 21 Details: Extracurricular Brainstorming Activity
- Do these with your friends/family
1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group effort over time.

- A leadership role can mean more than just being in charge. It can mean being a leader in your group, influencing other group members to work towards a common goal. What was your responsibility?

- Did you lead a team? How did your experience change your perspective on leading others? Did you help others see the importance of a certain task or solution?

- You might consider sharing your experience outside of school as well. For example, do you help out or take care of your family?

- You might also consider dealing with a challenge or series of challenges, then describe what you did about it, and include any lessons you learned.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

- Creative does not only mean ARTISTIC! You can be creative in the ways you solve problems or how you make your thinking non-traditional and innovative.

- What does creativity mean to you? Do you have a creative skill that is important to you? What have you been able to do with that skill?

- How does your creativity influence your decisions inside or outside the classroom? Does your creativity drive to your major or a future career?

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

- If there's a talent or skill that you're proud of, this is the time to share it. You don't necessarily have to be recognized or have received awards for your talent (although if you did, you want to talk about your talent to do so).

- Why is this talent or skill meaningful to you?

- Have you ever worked hard to develop this skill or talent?

- Include specific examples of how you've used your talent or skill in your life. How do you measure your success in this area?
4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome educational barriers you have faced.

- An educational opportunity can be anything that has added value to your educational experience. For example, a good college, a local college experience, or an experience in an educational development program. If you have experienced an opportunity, tell us about it. How did you overcome it?
- What personal characteristics or skills did you need to overcome this challenge?
- Educational barriers can include social fragmentation, or specific to one class or concept. Provide an example. What did you do to overcome these challenges?
- How did overcoming this barrier help you or others?
- What did you accomplish?
- What you did about it?
- How did you improve?

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you took to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

- Sometimes we face challenges in our academic life. Share with us the challenges you have faced and how you overcame them. What was your biggest challenge in school and what did you learn from it?
- What did you do to overcome this challenge?
- What were the obstacles you faced?
- What were the challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- How did this challenge affect your academic achievement?

6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and outside the classroom.

- Many students have a passion for a specific academic subject area. Think about a subject that inspires you, whether it be inside or outside the classroom. How have you furthered your interest in this subject?
- What are your interests in this subject and how do you pursue them?
- How have you pursued this interest outside of the classroom?
- What have you done to further your interest in this subject?
- What have you learned about this subject that has been helpful to you?
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admission to the University of California?

Prewriting... Round 2!

Pick FOUR UC Personal Insight Questions and quick write for 5 minutes each.
2019-2020 Common Application Essay

- Freshmen must select 1 question to respond to from the 7 options.
- Response is limited to no more than 650 words.
- Students graduating in 2019 and 2020 are required to answer all questions.

All questions are equal. All are given equal consideration in the application review process, which means there is no advantage to answering one question over another.

There is no right or wrong way to answer these questions. It’s about getting to know your personality, background, interests and achievements in your own unique voice.

One prompt: growing up

2019-2020 Common Application Essay

Prompts (650 word essay)

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If you believe this applies to you, please describe in 400-650 words.

Example:

Prompt 1: How does this background and identity shape your life, dreams, and goals?

2. What is something you've accomplished or learned that process was the most meaningful and significant to you? Explain in 400-650 words.

Example:

Prompt 2: What did you learn about yourself and the world through this experience?

3. What is a time when you experienced fracture and how did you recover or learn from it?

Example:

Prompt 3: How did you handle this challenge or failure?

4. What is a time when you worked with others to achieve a shared goal? How did this experience shape you?

Example:

Prompt 4: What did you learn from working with others?

5. What is something you've learned that you feel is essential to your personal growth?

Example:

Prompt 5: How has this experience helped you?

6. Describe a time when you were faced with a difficult choice. What did you learn from this experience?

Example:

Prompt 6: How did this choice impact your life?

7. What is a time when you had to make a difficult decision? What did you learn from it?

Example:

Prompt 7: How did this decision affect you?

2019-2020 Common Application Essay

Prompts

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

Prompts 1, 2, 3, and 7

6. Describe a time when you were faced with a difficult choice. How did this experience shape you?

Prompts 2, 3, and 7

7. Describe a time when you worked with others to achieve a shared goal. What did you learn from this experience?

Prompts 4, 5, and 7
Supplemental Essays

- Supplemental essays are additional pieces of writing required by many highly-selective universities.
- Don't use the essays to repeat the information that's already available — reveal something that can't be found anywhere else in the application.
- Word count is usually limited — about 250 words; Multiple supplemental essays required.
- Examples:
  - UCD: Describe something about your intended academic major, which you are interested in learning.
  - What about being a student at Boston University most excites you?
  - If you could have met with any scientist (past, present, or future), who would it be and why?
UC Personal Insight Questions: Prewriting # 1

You will have 8 questions to choose from. You must respond to only 4 of the 8 questions. Each response is limited to a maximum of 350 words.

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?
UC Personal Insight Questions: Prewriting # 2

You will have 8 questions to choose from. You must respond to only 4 of the 8 questions. Each response is limited to a maximum of 350 words.

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
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7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?
UC Personal Insight Questions
For UC (University of California) schools.
Choose FOUR prompts.
350 words each, strict limit.

Prompt 1: Leadership
Prompt 2: Creativity
Prompt 3: Greatest Talent or Skill
Prompt 4: Educational Opportunity or Barrier
Prompt 5: Significant Challenge
Prompt 6: Favorite Subject
Prompt 7: Community Service
Prompt 8: What sets you apart?

Use each prompt to tell the reader something DIFFERENT about YOU!

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?
How to write the “leadership” essay.
Prompt: 1

Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

- A leadership role can mean more than just a title. It can mean being a mentor to others, acting as the person in charge of a specific task, or taking the lead role in organizing an event or project. Think about what you accomplished and what you learned from the experience. What were your responsibilities?

- Did you lead a team? How did your experience change your perspective on leading others? Did you help to resolve an important dispute at your school, church, in your community or an organization? And your leadership role doesn't necessarily have to be limited to school activities. For example, do you help out or take care of your family?

- You might consider discussing several ways you have shown leadership through a particular club/internship/class/sport/religious organization.
  - You would then have two connective themes for your essay – describing the leadership activity AND how you took on a leadership role, what was accomplished, successes/challenges, etc.

- You might also consider starting with a challenge or series of challenges, then describe what you did about it, and include a few lessons you learned.
How to write the “creative” essay.

Prompt: 2

Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

- Creative does not only mean ARTISTIC! You can be creative in the ways you problem solve or how you make your thinking original and innovative = different!

- What does creativity mean to you? Do you have a creative skill that is important to you? What have you been able to do with that skill? If you used creativity to solve a problem, what was your solution? What are the steps you took to solve the problem?

- How does your creativity influence your decisions inside or outside the classroom? Does your creativity relate to your major or a future career?
How to write the “greatest talent or skill” essay.
Prompt: 3

What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

- If there’s a talent or skill that you’re proud of, this is the time to share it. You don’t necessarily have to be recognized or have received awards for your talent (although if you did and you want to talk about it, feel free to do so).

- Why is this talent or skill meaningful to you?

- Does the talent come naturally or have you worked hard to develop this skill or talent?

- Does your talent or skill allow you opportunities in or outside the classroom? If so, what are they and how do they fit into your schedule?

- Add in your experience! Make the reader see you understand your talent or skill.

- Try to pick an uncommon skill – if common, try to make your experience uncommon.
  - Look past common values such as hardworking, works well with others, efficiency, collaboration, etc.
  - Replace with more personal and thoughtful values such as self-expression, bravery, personal development, and accountability.
How to write the “educational opportunity or barrier” essay.

Prompt: 4

Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

- An educational opportunity can be anything that has added value to your educational experience and better prepared you for college. For example, participation in an honors or academic enrichment program, or enrollment in an academy that’s geared toward an occupation or a major, or taking advanced courses that interest you — just to name a few.

- If you choose to write about educational barriers you’ve faced, how did you overcome or strive to overcome them?

- What personal characteristics or skills did you call on to overcome this challenge?

- Educational barriers can include school in general, be specific to one class or concept/project, or relate to parent involvement/first generation.

- How did overcoming this barrier help shape who are you today?

- Think of this essay in 3 parts:
  - Opportunity or barrier
  - What you did about it
  - What you learned from it
How to write the “significant challenges” essay.
Prompt: 5

Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

- A challenge could be personal, or something you have faced in your community or school. Why was the challenge significant to you?

- This is a good opportunity to talk about any obstacles you've faced and what you've learned from the experience. Did you have support from someone else or did you handle it alone?

- If you're currently working your way through a challenge, what are you doing now, and does that affect different aspects of your life?

- For example, ask yourself, “How has my life changed at home, at my school, with my friends or with my family?”

- Sample structure:
  - Challenge(s)
    - What does the reader need to know in order to understand why this challenge you faced was such a big deal?
    - What circumstances made the situation worse?
  - What you did
    - What did you do first that didn’t work/help? If that did not work, what did you try next and why?
    - After you found what worked/helped, what else did you do?
  - What you learned
    - How can you go beyond the obvious take away?
      - Ex: “Not only did I learn the value of working with others, but I also learned that there is a time when working alone is actually okay, in fact sometimes it's exactly right.”
    - How did you meet a deeper need? Spend time reflecting on this.
How to write the “favorite subject” essay.

Prompt: 6

Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

❖ Many students have a passion for one specific academic subject area, something that they just can’t get enough of. If that applies to you, what have you done to further that interest?

❖ Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had inside and outside the classroom — such as volunteer work, internships, employment, summer programs, participation in student organizations and/or clubs — and what you have gained from your involvement.

❖ Has your interest in the subject influenced you in choosing a major and/or future career? Have you been able to pursue coursework at a higher level in this subject (honors, college, or university work)?

❖ Are you inspired to pursue this subject further at UC, and how might you do that?
How to write the "community service" essay.

Prompt: 7

What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

- Think of community as a term that can encompass a group, team or a place — like your high school, hometown or home.

- You can define community as you see fit, just make sure you talk about your role in that community.

- Was there a problem that you wanted to fix in your community?

- Why were you inspired to act?

- What did you learn from your effort?

- How did your actions benefit others, the wider community or both?

- Did you work alone or with others to initiate change in your community?

Sample structure:

- Identify the problem – why did you feel the "need or push" to make your school or community a better place?
- Why now? – why did you choose to get involved after knowing about the issues?
- Articulate the vision – how did you anticipate you would be able to help?
- Describe what you did to help
- Clarify your role – what did YOU do that helped "fix/change" the problem?
- Impact you had, lessons learned, or values gained
How to write the “one thing that sets you apart” essay.

Prompt: 8

Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

❖ If there’s anything you want the UC’s to know about you, but didn’t find a question or place in the application to tell them, now’s your chance.

❖ What have you not shared with us that will highlight a skill, talent, challenge or opportunity that you think will help us know you better?

❖ From your point of view, what do you feel makes you an excellent choice for UC? Don’t be afraid to brag a little.
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| - risk    |
| - balance |
| - self-discipline |
| - courage |
| - family  |
| - empathy |
| - working alone |
| - humility |
| - efficiency |
| - intensity |
| - health and fitness |
| - meaningful work |
| - my country |
| - music    |
| - truth    |
| - resourcefulness |
| - challenges |
| - commitment |
| - leadership |
| - helping others |
| - influence |
| - wit      |
| - success |
| - patience |
| - listening |
| - diversity |
| - love     |
| - fast-paced work |
| - nutrition  |
| - competence |
| - practicality |
| - creativity |
| - excitement |
| - collaboration |
| - social change |
| - beauty    |
| - ecological awareness |
| - quality relationships |
| - travel    |
| - decisiveness |
| - curiosity |
| - spirituality |
| - loyalty   |
| - honesty   |
| - independence |
| - supervising others |
| - recognition |
| - accountability |
| - democracy |
| - close relationships |
| - religion  |
| - respect   |
| - bravery   |
| - communication |
| - change and variety |
| - compassion |
| - nature    |

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12

info@collegeessayguy.com
The "Four Ways I've Been Challenged in My Life" Exercise

How it works: Name four ways you've been challenged and an impact you experienced as a result of each.

Example: Both my parents worked full-time, which meant I had to watch my little sister (challenge), making it difficult for me to participate in extracurricular activities (impact).

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<th>CHALLENGE</th>
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Here are some challenges you might consider writing about:

- Single-parent household
- Significant work hours while in high school, particularly if you contributed to family income to help pay bills
- Low income family or large family with many dependents
- You're the first person in your family to attend college
- Parent's disability or unemployment (specify what and how long)
- Any physical or learning disabilities (diagnosed by a health professional; specify what and how long)
- Language spoken at home other than English, or any portion of your high school career that was taken outside of the U.S.
- Unable to take specific classes at your school (APs, Honors)
- Health issues you've faced that have impacted your academic performance or ability to participate in extracurricular activities (diagnosed by a health professional; specify what and how long)
- Travel challenges (you lived too far away from school to participate in extracurriculars, your parents couldn't transport you, or didn't have transportation)

Tip: You may not want to devote an entire essay to a single challenge—try mentioning your challenge(s) in the context of a larger story (see the "Prayer T.II" example essay below).
List of Challenges

- adapting to a new culture in a new country
- moving a lot and having no real place to call home
- divorce
- being afraid to come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender
- having an extremely shy personality
- having to work to pay for groceries
- dealing with death of dad/grandfather/sister/etc.
- adjusting to a new school
- parents or siblings fighting a lot
- parents not being home a lot
- racism
- crime
- school or neighborhood violence
- failing to meet someone’s expectations
- alcohol or drug abuse
- joblessness or unemployment
- illness (you or someone close to you)
- failure
- natural disaster (hurricane, earthquake)
- car crash
- war
- home invasion or break-in
- fire
- ignorance
- physical injury
- physical disability
- mental illness
- suicide
- sibling rivalry
- getting rejected
- a learning difference or disability
- sexism
- abuse
- controlling behavior from family or friends
- dealing with an excessively critical person
- aggression/cruelty
- destructive behavior/bullying/cyberbullying
- peer pressure
- discrimination based on being a minority (race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.)
- lack of access to educational resources
- parents not supportive of your dreams
THE "FEELINGS AND NEEDS" EXERCISE

Adapted from an exercise created by Nonviolent Communication Expert LaShelle Lowe-Charlo (http://www.novioheartxis.x.or).}

When I saw/heard/experienced... (what event, positive or negative, did you experience?)

The effects were... (what were the external repercussions of the challenge?)

I felt... (Choose 1-3 emotions from the list below)

Because I needed...

Delighted
Joyful
Happy
Amused
Adventurous
Blissful
Elasted

Thankful
Appreciative
Moved
Touched
Tender
Expensive
Grateful

Excited
Enthusiastic
Overjoyed
Fervent
Giddy
Eager
Ecstatic
Thrilled

Satisfied
Fulfilled
Gratified

Interested
Curious
Absorbed

Healthy
Empowered
Alive
Robust

Relaxed
Relieved
Rested
Mellow
At ease
Light

Content
Cheerful
Glad
Comfortable
Pleased

Friendly
Affectionate
Loving
Passionate

Energetic
Exhilarated
Exuberant
Vigorous

Alert
Focused
Awake
Clearheaded

Peaceful
Tranquil
Serene
Calm

Confident
Secure
Safe
Hopeful

Scared
Apprehensive
Bead
Worried
Frightened
Vulnerable

Nervous
Jittery
Anxious
Restless
Vulnerable

Tense
Cranky
Stiff
Stressed
Overwhelmed
Agitated
Aggravated

Hurt
Pain
Agony
Anguish
Heartbroken
Lonely

*Depressed
Disconnected
Detached
Depressed
Depressed
Dazed

*Angry
*Furious
*Rage
*Tirade
*Revengeful
Irritated

Frustrated
Disappointed
Discouraged
Disheartened
Impatient

Shocked
Disturbed
Stunned
Alarmed
Appalled
Concerned
Horrified

Sad
Grief
Despair
Sorrow
Sullen
Downhearted
Hopeless
Lonely

Torn
Ambivalent
Confused
Puzzled

Jealous
Envious
*BITTER

*Embarrassed
Ashamed
Contrite
*Guilty

Intimacy
Empathy
Connection
Affection
Warmth
Love
Understanding
Acceptance
Caring
Bonding
Compassion
Communion
Devine Union
Sexuality

Autonomy
Choice
Freedom
Spontaneity
Independence
Respect
Honor

Security
Predictability
Consistency
Stability
Trust
Reassurance

Partnership
Mutuality
Friendship
Cooperation
Support
Collaboration
Belonging
Community
Consideration
Celebration

Purpose
Competence
Contribution
Efficiency
Growth
Learning
Challenge
Discovery

Order
Structure
Clarity
Focus
Information

Celebration
Mourning
Aliveness
Humor
Beauty
Play
Creativity
Joy

Honesty
Integrity
Authenticity
Wholeness
Fairness

Peace
Groundlessness
Hope
Healing
Harmony

Nurturing
Food/Water
Rest/Sleep
Safety
Support

* These are alarm feelings letting you know that judgments and "shoulds" are in your thoughts and you are disconnected from needs.

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**WHAT DID I DO ABOUT IT?**

To meet the need(s) just mentioned, I...

(What did you do? Example: I learned time management.)

*If you're still in process (i.e. haven't done anything yet) what could you do to meet those needs?*

As a result, I developed...

(What values did you develop? Choose 2-3 from below.)

*Again, if you haven't done that thing yet, what values do you anticipate developing?*

---

**WHAT DID I LEARN?**

- [ ] community
- [ ] inspiration
- [ ] money
- [ ] intellectual
- [ ] status
- [ ] financial gain
- [ ] laughter
- [ ] serenity
- [ ] physical challenge
- [ ] responsibility
- [ ] competition
- [ ] career
- [ ] fame
- [ ] working with others
- [ ] freedom
- [ ] security
- [ ] strength
- [ ] self-control
- [ ] hunger
- [ ] personal development
- [ ] trust
- [ ] faith
- [ ] involvement
- [ ] adventure
- [ ] vulnerability
- [ ] adaptability
- [ ] friendship
- [ ] excellence
- [ ] job tranquility
- [ ] power

- [ ] passion
- [ ] cooperation
- [ ] affection
- [ ] wisdom
- [ ] knowledge
- [ ] growth
- [ ] expertise
- [ ] order
- [ ] privacy
- [ ] self-expression
- [ ] stability
- [ ] art
- [ ] autonomy
- [ ] risk
- [ ] balance
- [ ] self-discipline
- [ ] courage
- [ ] family
- [ ] empathy
- [ ] working alone
- [ ] humility
- [ ] efficiency
- [ ] intensity
- [ ] health and fitness
- [ ] meaningful work
- [ ] my country
- [ ] music
- [ ] truth
- [ ] resourcefulness
- [ ] challenges

- [ ] leadership
- [ ] helping others
- [ ] influence
- [ ] wit
- [ ] success
- [ ] patience
- [ ] listening
- [ ] diversity
- [ ] love
- [ ] fast-paced work
- [ ] nutrition
- [ ] competence
- [ ] practicality
- [ ] creativity
- [ ] excitement
- [ ] collaboration
- [ ] social change
- [ ] beauty
- [ ] ecological awareness
- [ ] quality relationships
- [ ] travel
- [ ] decisiveness
- [ ] curiosity
- [ ] spirituality
- [ ] loyalty

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>What I Did</th>
<th>What I Learned</th>
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The "How Do I Lead?" Exercise

How it works: Name four ways you're a leader in your school, home, or community:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

Some possibilities to consider:

1. You hold or held a role with an impressive title. (Example: You were President or VP of something).

2. You started something (a club, non-profit, etc.). Bonus points if you started/founded something in response to a need you saw--either locally or abroad (see "Prayer Till" Example Essay below).

   But there are many other ways to lead! Less obvious examples include:

3. You were the key decision-maker on a particular project. You don't have to be President to lead!
   a. Ask yourself: What projects have I been involved in that would have had turned out very different without me?
   b. Maybe, for example: You were the layout editor for your yearbook. Sure, you weren't the Editor in Chief, but you did decide what went where and it took a ton of work.
   c. Or maybe: You helped draft the school's student constitution

4. You held more responsibility than others on a particular task.
   a. Were you in charge of the volunteers for Cesar Chavez Day?
   b. Are you responsible for counting the money at your job?

5. [What other leadership qualifications can you think of?] Write your answer here:
The 21 Details Exercise

On a blank sheet of paper, make a list of 21 details from your life: interesting facts that describe some small, random part of who you are.

As an example, here are some of my 21 details:

🌟 We moved 20 times while I was growing up and I attended 13 schools.
🌟 My biggest pet peeve is when the waiter takes my food before I've finished.
🌟 I eat salad with my hands. And never with dressing.
🌟 The worst feeling in the world is the dentist's air suction tube sucking air over my teeth.
🌟 I love popping bubble wrap.
🌟 When I was young I used to use my finger to wipe off the top layer of toothpaste that I shared with my sister so I wouldn't get her germs.
🌟 I've never, ever seriously contemplated suicide.
🌟 I find most people fascinating and can talk to just about anyone.
🌟 I've won several awards in my life, but I'm most proud of these two: finishing second in the elementary school Spelling Bee when I was nine and being named MVP of the middle school floor hockey All-Star game when I was eleven.
🌟 The most painful thing I ever experienced was breaking my kneecap in the 10th grade during a basketball game. The physical pain wasn't the worst part, though: it was losing the rest of the season and watching my team go 0-18.
🌟 My three younger brothers and I have never, as far as I can remember, ever had a fight.

Now it's your turn...
How to Write This Type of Essay

1. Create a simple outline by filling out the...

**Best Extracurricular Activity Brainstorm I've Ever Seen**

(Barbies)

What is it? It's a great way to generate a lot of content for your essay. Take a look at this example:

**Activity:** Rowing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Did (Day-to-Day)</th>
<th>Problems I Solved</th>
<th>Lessons I Learned &amp; Values/Skills I Developed</th>
<th>Impact I Had (On Self, School, Community and/or Society)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Rowed for 3 years, 9 seasons, and countless hours.</td>
<td>🎁 Slower than most girls in the first month.</td>
<td>🎁 Solid form and technique in both port and starboard side.</td>
<td>🎁 Started to work out/watch what I eat on a daily basis and get healthier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Attended every practice except 9 or 10 because of an injury</td>
<td>🎁 Didn't understand the rowing terms or how an organized sport works.</td>
<td>🎁 &quot;Teamwork is important&quot; is an understatement</td>
<td>🎁 Changed my definition of living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Placed twice in the finals and once in semi-finals in the Midwest Scholastic Rowing Championship.</td>
<td>🎁 Didn't know how to row correctly and effectively.</td>
<td>🎁 When you don't understand, ask.</td>
<td>🎁 Began to have something to fight for in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Won 5 gold medals, 4 silver medals, 2 bronze medals, and many other medal-less races.</td>
<td>🎁 Too skinny and out of shape</td>
<td>🎁 &quot;Quit crew or triple your commitment.&quot;</td>
<td>🎁 Started to love nature (lake, forests, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Spent hours gathering music and created a Spotify playlist of workout music (still update it).</td>
<td>🎁 Lacked proper mentality and good physique.</td>
<td>🎁 &quot;Be the meanest dude on the lake.&quot;</td>
<td>🎁 Started to hangout with friends outside of my Chinese circle of friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Teach novice rowers techniques, strategies, and mindsets.</td>
<td>🎁 Bad rowing form that remained poor for a long time</td>
<td>🎁 Drain the last bit of your energy, if not for yourself, then for others and your teammates.</td>
<td>🎁 Have new connections with other people besides classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎁 Dedicated a big portion of my free time working out.</td>
<td>🎁 Faced stereotyping from peers against Asians</td>
<td>🎁 Other teams are not usually as strong as they may seem.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How this works: First, write what you did, then basically ask yourself "So what" three times.

Example:

A. **What I did:** I started a Robotics Club

1. So what?

B. **Problem(s) I solved:** I'd been searching for a way to take my interests in Engineering to the next level (had tinkered with taking things apart and watching YouTube videos, but wanted to do more). Also, there weren't that many after-school programs offered at our school.

1. So what?

C. **Lessons I learned/Values I gained:** I learned that it's a lot of work to maintain a club, that if one is kind and hard-working great things happen, and that one key to leading a team is learning how to trust team members and not micromanage them.

1. So what?

D. **Impact on self/school/community/society:** I became more confident in my ability to lead, I gave STEM students at my school a chance to express their creativity, I gave our school its first trophy for something other than football, and not only showed that undocumented students have a lot to offer, but also provided hope to other Dreamers like me (my little sister is taking over the club next year).

2. Decide which two columns are your strongest.

In other words, which two are most impressive: What you did? The problem(s) you solved? The lessons you learned/skills you gained? Or the impact you had?

Examples:

* In the Switch-Side Policy Debate essay above, the author’s most impressive columns were **WHAT I DID** and **IMPACT**, so he focused those in the essay.

* In the rowing example, the author didn’t have quite as many impressive details related to impact, so the essay might have focused more on the **WHAT I DID** and **VALUES/SKILLS GAINED**.

Once you pick the two most impressive columns, keep in mind you’ll want to feature those in your essay. **Note:** if you have one or two details in a third or fourth column that you think is still really important to mention (like something you were recognized for), try and work that into your essay.

3. Theme your paragraphs.

Decide, in other words, what you’d like to do in each section of the essay.

For the Switch-Side Policy Debate essay, for example, the paragraphs might be themed:

a. The main reason debate has been important to me
b. How I've impacted others
c. How debate has impacted me (outside the club itself)
d. How these skills will help me in my future career or careers

For the rowing essay, the paragraphs could simply be themed:

a. Challenges I faced
b. What I did about it
c. What I learned

And here’s a tip: keep your outline to around 3-5 parts. That’ll make your job easier. Once you’ve done this...

4. Write a draft!
2019-2020 Common Application Essay Prompts

650 word essay

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Prompts 2, 3, and 6

2. 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?

Prompts 4 and 5

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

Prompts 1 and 7
4. Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

Prompt 1, 5, and 7

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

Prompts 1, 2, 3, and 7

6. 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?

Prompt 3

7. 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.

Any prompt!
Sample Essays
UC Personal Insight Sample: Favorite Subject

Some say I don't seem like the "techy type." That doesn't surprise me—I've always been the illogical sort, the sort who loves slam poetry and movies that make no sense. My love affair with programming only began a little over three years ago, during the summer I tried to reinvent myself.

Somewhere between studying Esperanto, learning the violin, and figuring out eyeliner, I decided to become a hacker. The problem? I'd need a working knowledge of computers. After some Googling around, I settled on a decent-but-free guide to Python and got to work.

And I loved it. I loved the logic of it, loved that there were a million solutions to one single problem. I forgot all about hacking and instead took to writing games. They started simple—little virtual pets I could feed and name and sometimes accidentally murder—but by the time the summer drew to a close, my projects had blossomed into thousand-line epic adventures.

Needless to say, when I found out my school offered an introductory programming course, I signed up immediately. In fact, I took every class I could get my hands on, from APCS to after-school courses at a nearby college. Programming soon proved a useful skill, too; I wrote apps for everything, from schedulekeeping to helping me memorize poems for English. Though I still wasn't the "techy type"—I loved my fashion blogs and my fantasy novels—I found myself turning to my knowledge of technology to solve day-to-day problems.

The summer after my junior year, I took an internship at a local start up. There, designing childrens' fitness games, of all things, I realized there was no "techy type."

Technology isn't all hacking and cold, hard logic; it's taking creative approaches to real-world problems. Programming is an art—an art with the power to change the world.

Word count: 306
UC Personal Insight Sample: Community Service

I live in the suburb of Los Angeles, California, known to its residents as the bubble. It has the perfect weather, location, and schools. As amazing as it sounds, however, growing up in La Cañada Flintridge has its drawbacks: the community pressures adolescents to achieve success through mainly academic means. While this approach isn’t necessarily wrong, it can be difficult, particularly in my high school, to thrive in a creative and imaginative way.

Sophomore year, my friends and I began to wonder, What if the teenagers of La Cañada had greater opportunities to express themselves. To pursue their creativity. To follow their dreams.

That’s when we decided to start the Catalyzing Creativity Club.

Founded in 2012, the Catalyzing Creativity Club (C3, for short), provides students the opportunity to pursue their passion and aspirations outside the classroom.

Some of our opportunities include: a yearly music festival for our community’s young aspiring musicians that showcases local talent to the masses and scouts; a technology expo, which allows students to be rewarded with funding and demonstrate their coding abilities to prospective companies; recording sessions for aspiring musicians, photo-publishing competitions, and a variety of guest speakers ranging from nineteen-year-old college seniors to millionaire entrepreneurs. In addition, we have a blog for aspiring writers to publish their work and are holding a shoe drive for underprivileged athletes.

As vice president of finances for C3, I work to ensure we can fund these activities. I handle our bank account, fundraising, and organize the event planning. Moreover, I make sure that C3’s activities and finances are approved by and follow the guidelines of my high school. This role is crucial, as we work to achieve non-profit status.

Even though C3 is only a few years old, I believe it is already making an impact in the community. As we grow and the opportunities we provide become more popular, our hope is to inspire our peers to follow their dreams and burst the La Cañada Flintridge bubble.

Word count: 333
Personal Statement Sample

At age three, I was separated from my mother. The court gave full custody of both my baby brother and me to my father. Of course, at my young age, I had no clue what was going on. However, it did not take me long to realize that life with my father would not be without its difficulties.

My brother, Anthony, was eleven months old when my father placed us in the hands of our first babysitter. I remember being confused at first, wondering where my father had gone and when he would be back, but after a while, I became accustomed to this routine of absence and the never ending babysitters that filled in for him. These strangers consisted of college students, chain-smokers, senile women, and foreigners—all were technically adults, but not one was a suitable substitute for a parent. When my father was home, he still seemed absent; he was distant both physically and emotionally. He was busy bouncing from one girlfriend to the next, sleeping in until 1:30 in the afternoon, and sitting on the couch watching television. He took us out to restaurants every night and wasted the money he earned on expensive dinners, his current girlfriend, and liquor. This continued for ten years.

Legally, we had all the necessities to survive, but in truth our home was devoid of structure. Schoolwork went unchecked. Bedtimes were unregulated. Dust accumulated in thick layers on the paperwork that overflowed on the dining table. Often times, Anthony and I would spend hours waiting at school for someone to pick us up, and most of our dinners were served well past eleven at night.

Consequentially, and quite unwittingly, I shed my childhood and assumed the role of “parent” for Anthony before my seventh birthday. I memorized the routes we took to school and led Anthony home myself. I watched professional chefs on PBS and learned how to cook basic meals for two. Unfortunately, as I progressively developed into the parent, Anthony took advantage of our lack of true authority and grew into the epitome of a problem child. He became unruly, and his behavior soon bled into his school life. His grades suffered and he seemed to act out more often. His rash temper continued to grow until one day the school called our home because he had tried to throw a chair at his teacher.

Anthony was the only kindergartner in our school’s history to be suspended. The school counselor recommended that when my father was in town we attend therapy as a family. But that accomplished nothing—my father’s initial attempts to implement authority devolved quickly into apathy, and then he was traveling again. I, on the other hand, would not give up so easily. I became the watchful eye and mentor that Anthony and I both needed. I soaked in the parenting videos that our family counselor had given my dad. I explained to Anthony why a structured lifestyle is important and why retribution is needed for one’s misdeeds. To further instill self-discipline in him, I would have him formulate his own penalties. I also began to follow up on his schoolwork by contacting his teachers. On one particularly hopeful afternoon I even tried to introduce him to books that I had read— but I learned I can’t win every battle. I wasn’t satisfied with just giving a fish to my little brother; I wanted to teach him how to cast lines himself and learn the tools of self-reliance. Looking back at my hectic childhood, I am grateful for the insight it afforded me, and I am grateful for the effect my little brother had on me.

Inadvertently, by raising Anthony I ended up raising myself. Living with my unreliable father and reliant younger brother gave me the need and incentive to find myself and to mature quickly. At a very early age I became resourceful, independent, and responsible. It makes me proud to know that I single-handedly raised Anthony and myself. I now know that I can face any challenge with confidence. Even if I don’t succeed, I know I will be stronger just for trying.
With Debate (Type A)

Written by a student who has faced significant challenges and did know what she wanted to study.

The clock was remarkably slow as I sat, legs tightly crossed, squirming at my desk. "Just raise your hand," my mind pleaded, "ask." But despite my urgent need to visit the restroom, I remained seated, begging time to move faster. You see, I was that type of kid to eat French Fries dry because I couldn't confront the McDonald's cashier for some Heinz packets. I was also the type to sit crying in front of school instead of asking the office if it could check on my late ride. Essentially, I chose to struggle through a problem if the solution involved speaking out against it.

My indifference was frustrating. My parents relied on me, the only one able to speak English, to guide them, and always anticipated the best from me. However, as cells for help grew, the more defunct I became. I felt that every move I made, it was a gamble between success and failure. For me, the fear of failure and disappointment far outweighed the possibility of triumph, so I took no action and chose to silently suffer under pressure.

Near meltdown, I knew something needed to be done. Muster up the little courage I had, I sought ways to break out of my shell—without luck. Recreational art classes ended in three boring months. I gave up Self Defense after embarrassing myself in class. After-school band, library volunteering, and book clubs ended similarly. Continued effort yielded nothing.

Disillusioned and wrung dry of ideas, I followed my mom's advice and joined a debate club. As expected, the club only reaffirmed my self-doubt. Eye contact? Greater volume? No thanks.

But soon, the club moved on from "how to make a speech" lessons to the exploration of argumentation. We were taught to speak the language of Persuasion, and play the game of Debate. Eventually, I fell in love with it all.

By high school, I joined the school debate team, began socializing, and was even elected to head several clubs. I developed critical and analytical thinking skills, and learned how to think and speak spontaneously.

I became proud and confident. Moreover, I became eager to play my role in the family, and family relations strengthened. In fact, nowadays, my parents are interested in my school's newest gossip.

Four years with debate, and now I'm the kid up at the white board; the kid leading discussions; and the kid standing up for her beliefs.

More importantly, I now confront issues instead of avoiding them. It is exciting to discover solutions to problems that affect others, as I was able to do as part of the 1st Place team for the 2010 United Nations Global Debates Program on climate change and poverty. I took a natural interest in global issues, and plan to become a foreign affairs analyst or diplomat by studying international affairs with a focus on national identity.

In particular, I am interested in the North-South Korean tension. What irreconcilable differences have prompted a civilization to separate? Policy implications remain vague, and sovereignty theories have their limits—how do we determine what compromises are to be made? And on a personal level, why did my grandfather have to flee from his destroyed North Korean hometown—and why does it matter?

I see a reflection of myself in the divide at the 38th parallel because I see one part isolating itself in defense to outside threats, and another part coming out to face the world as one of the fastest-developing nations. Just as my shy persona before debate and extroverted character after debate are both part of who I am, the Korean civilization is also one. And just as my parents expect much from me, the first of my family to attend college, I have grand expectations for this field of study.

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Endodontics (Type B)

Written by a student who has not faced significant challenges but did know what he wanted to study.

As a kid I was always curious. I was unafraid to ask questions and didn’t worry how dumb they would make me sound. In second grade I enrolled in a summer science program and built a solar-powered oven that baked real cookies. I remember obsessing over the smallest details: Should I paint the oven black to absorb more heat? What about its shape? A spherical shape would allow for more volume, but would it trap heat as well as conventional rectangular ovens? Even then I was obsessed with the details of design.

And it didn’t stop in second grade.

A few years later I designed my first pair of shoes, working for hours to perfect each detail, including whether the laces should be mineral white or diamond white. Even then I sensed that minor differences in tonality could make a huge impact and that different colors could evoke different responses.

In high school I moved on to more advanced projects, teaching myself how to take apart, repair, and customize cell phones. Whether I was adjusting the flex cords that connect the IPS LCD to the iPhone motherboard, or replacing the vibrator motor, I loved discovering the many engineering feats Apple overcame in its efforts to combine form with function.

And once I obtained my driver’s license, I began working on cars. Many nights you’ll find me in the garage replacing standard chrome trim with an elegant piano black finish or changing the threads on the stitching of the seats to add a personal touch, as I believe a few small changes can transform a generic product into a personalized work of art.

My love of details applies to my schoolwork too.

I’m the math geek who marvels at the fundamental theorems of Calculus, or who sees beauty in $A = (a(s-e)(s-b)(s-c))^\frac{1}{2}$. Again, it’s in the details: one bracket off or one digit missing and the whole equation collapses. And details are more than details, they can mean the difference between negative and positive infinity, an impossible range of solutions.

I also love sharing this appreciation with others and have taken it upon myself to personally eradicate mathophobia/confusophobia, my Calculus teacher’s term for “extreme fear of Math.” A small group of other students and I have devoted our after-school time to tutoring our peers in everything from Pre-Algebra to AP Calculus BC and I believe my fluency in Hebrew and Farsi has helped me connect with some of my school’s Israeli and Iranian students. There’s nothing better than seeing a student solve a difficult problem without me saying anything.

You probably think I want to be a designer. Or perhaps an engineer?

Wrong. Well, kind of.

Actually, I want to study Endodontics, which is (I’ll save you the Wikipedia look-up) a branch of dentistry that deals with the tooth pulp and the tissues surrounding the root of a tooth. As an Endodontist, I’ll be working to repair damaged teeth by performing precision root canals and implementing dental crowns. Sound exciting? It is to me.

The fact is, it’s not unlike the work I’ve been doing repairing cellphone circuits and modifying cars, though there is one small difference: in the future I’ll still be working to repair machines, but this machine is one of the most sophisticated machines ever created: the human body. Here, my obsession with details will be as crucial as ever. A one millimeter difference can mean the difference between a successful root canal and a lawsuit.

The question is: will the toothbrushes I hand out be mineral white or diamond white?
Raising Anthony (Type C)

Written by a student who did face challenges, but did not know what she wanted to study.

At age three, I was separated from my mother. The court gave full custody of both my baby brother and me to my father. Of course, at my young age, I had no clue what was going on. However, it did not take me long to realize that life with my father would not be without its difficulties.

My brother, Anthony, was eleven months old when my father placed us in the hands of our first babysitter. I remember being confused at first, wondering where my father had gone and when he would be back, but after a while, I became accustomed to this routine of absence and the never-ending babysitters that filled in for him. These strangers consisted of college students, chain-smokers, senior citizens, and foreigners—all were technically adults, but not one was a suitable substitute for a parent. When my father was home, he still seemed absent; he was distant both physically and emotionally. He was busy bouncing from one girlfriend to the next, sleeping in until 1:30 in the afternoon, and sitting on the couch watching television. He took us out to restaurants every night and wasted the money he earned on expensive dinners, his current girlfriend, and liquor. This continued for ten years.

Legally, we had all the necessities to survive, but in truth our home was devoid of structure. Schoolwork went unchecked. Bedtimes were unregulated. Dust accumulated in thick layers on the paperworks that overflowed on the dining table. Often times, Anthony and I would spend hours waiting at school for someone to pick us up, and most of our dinners were served well past eleven at night.

Consequently, and quite unwillingly, I shed my childhood and assumed the role of "parent" for Anthony before my seventh birthday. I memorized the routes we took to school and led Anthony home myself. I watched professional chefs on PBS and learned how to cook basic meals for two. Unfortunately, as I progressively developed into the parent, Anthony took advantage of our lack of true authority and grew into the epitome of a problem child. He became unruly, and his behavior soon bled into his school life. His grades suffered and he seemed to act out more often. His rash temper continued to grow until one day the school called our home because he had tried to throw a chair at his teacher.

Anthony was the only kindergartner in our school's history to be suspended. The school counselor recommended that when my father was in town we attend therapy as a family. But that accomplished nothing—my father's initial attempts to implement authority devolved quickly into apathy, and then he was traveling again. I, on the other hand, would not give up so easily. I became the watchful eye and mentor that Anthony and I both needed.

I soaked in the parenting videos that our family counselor had given my dad. I explained to Anthony why a structured lifestyle is important and why retribution is needed for one's misdeeds. To further instill self-discipline in him, I would have him formulate his own penalties. I also began to follow up on his homework by contacting his teachers. On one particularly hopeful afternoon I even tried to introduce him to books that I had read—but I learned I can't win every battle. I wasn't satisfied with just giving a fish to my little brother; I wanted to teach him how to cast lines himself and learn the tools of self-reliance. Looking back at my hectic childhood, I am grateful for the insight it afforded me, and I am grateful for the effect my little brother had on me.

Inadvertently, by raising Anthony I ended up raising myself. Living with my unreliable father and reliant younger brother gave me the need and incentive to find myself and to mature quickly. At a very early age I became resourceful, independent, and responsible. It makes me proud to know that I single-handedly raised Anthony and myself. I now know that I can face any challenge with confidence. Even if I don't succeed, I know I will be stronger just for trying.

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Five Families (Type D)

By a student who did not face challenges and did not know what he wanted to study.

I can live with anyone anywhere.

When I was 16, I lived with the Watkins family in Wichita, Kansas. Mrs. Watkins was the coordinator of the foreign exchange student program I was enrolled in. She had a nine-year-old son named Cody. I would babysit Cody every day after school for at least two to three hours. We would play Scrabble or he would read to me from Charlotte's Web or The Ugly Duckling. He would talk a lot about his friends and school life, and I would listen to him and ask him the meanings of certain words. He was my first friend in the New World.

My second family was the Martinez family, who were friends of the Watkins's. The host dad Michael was a high school English teacher and the host mom Jennifer (who had me call her "Jen") taught elementary school. She had recently delivered a baby, so she was still in the hospital when I moved into their house. The Martinez family did almost everything together. We made pizza together, watched Shrek on their cozy couch together, and went fishing on Sunday together. On rainy days, Michael, Jen, and I would sit on the porch and listen to the rain, talking about our dreams and thoughts. Within two months I was calling them mom and dad.

After I finished the exchange student program, I had the option of returning to Korea but I decided to stay in America. I wanted to see new places and meet different people. Since I wasn't an exchange student anymore, I had the freedom—and burden—of finding a new school and host family on my own. After a few days of thorough investigation, I found the Struikes family in California. They were a unique group.

The host mom Shekie was a single mom who had two of her own sons and two Russian daughters that she had adopted. The kids always had something warm to eat, and were always on their best behavior at home and in school. It would be fair to say that this was all due to Shekie's upbringing. My room was on the first floor, right in front of Shekie's hair salon, a small business that she ran out of her home. In the living room were six or seven huge amplifiers and a gigantic chandelier hung from the high ceiling. The kitchen had a bar. At first, the non-stop visits from strangers made me nervous, but soon I got used to them. I remember as a child, a couple barged into my room while I was sleeping. It was awkward.

After a few months I realized we weren't the best fit. In the nicest way possible, I told them I had to leave. They understood.

The Ortiz family was my fourth family. Kimberly, the host mom, treated me the same way she treated her own son. She made me do chores: I fixed dinner, fed their two dogs Sassy and Lady, and once a week I cleaned the bathroom. I also had to follow some rules: No food in my room, no using the family computer, no lights on after midnight, and no ride unless it was an emergency. The first couple of months were really hard to get used to, but eventually I adjusted.

I lived with the Ortiz family for seven months like a monk in the deep forest. However, the host dad Greg's asthma got worse after winter, so he wanted to move to the countryside. It was unexpected and I only had a week to find a new host family. I asked my friend Danielle if I could live with her until I found a new home. That's how I met the Dirkson family, my fifth family.

The Dirkson family had three kids. They were all different. Danielle liked bitter black coffee, Christian liked energy drinks, and Becce liked sweet lemon tea. Dawn, the host mom didn't like winter, and Mark, the host dad, didn't like summer. After dinner, we would all play Wii Sports together. I was the King of bowling, and Dawn was the queen of tennis. I don't remember a single time that they argued about the games. Afterward, we would gather in the living room and Danielle would play the piano while the rest of us sang hymns.
Porcelain God

Rowing down to the porcelain god, I emptied the contents of my stomach. Foaming at the mouth, I was ready to pass out. My body couldn’t stop shaking as I gasped for air, and the room started spinning.

Ten minutes prior, I had been eating dinner with my family at a Chinese restaurant, drinking chicken-foot soup. My mom had specifically asked the waitress if there were peanuts in it, because when I was two we found out that I am deathly allergic to them. When the waitress replied no, I went for it. Suddenly I started scratching my neck, feeling the hives that had started to form. I rushed to the restroom to throw up because my throat was itchy and I felt a weight on my chest. I was experiencing anaphylactic shock, which prevented me from taking anything but shallow breaths. I was fighting the one thing that is meant to protect me and keep me alive — my own body.

At five years old, I couldn’t comprehend what had happened. All I knew was that I felt sick, and I was waiting for my mom to give me something to make it better. I thought my parents were superheroes; surely they would be able to make well again. But I became scared when I heard the fear in their voices as they rushed me to the ER.

After that incident, I began to fear. I became scared of death, eating, and even my own body. As I grew older, I became paranoid about checking food labels and I avoided eating if I didn’t know what was in the food. I knew what could happen if I ate one wrong thing, and I wasn’t willing to risk it for a snack. Ultimately, that fear turned into resentment; I resented my body for making me an outsider.

In the years that followed, this experience and my regular visits to my allergy specialist inspired me to become an allergy specialist. Even though I was probably only ten at the time, I wanted to find a way to help kids like me. I wanted to find a solution so that nobody would have to feel the way I did; nobody deserved to feel that pain, fear, and resentment. As I learned more about the medical world, I became more fascinated with the body’s immune responses, specifically, how the body reacts to allergens. This past summer, I took a month-long course on human immunology at Stanford University. I learned about the different mechanisms and cells that our bodies use in order to fight off pathogens. My desire to major in biology in college has been stimulated by my fascination with the human body, its processes, and the desire to find a way to help people with allergies. I hope that one day I can find a way to stop allergic reactions or at least lessen the symptoms, so that children and adults don’t have to feel the same fear and bitterness that I felt.
Bowling

By a student who did face challenges and did not know what she wanted to study.

Every weekend, my family and I go to the bowling alley. We either go to Lucky Strike in Orange County, to 300 in Pasadena or the AMF Bowledrome in Torrance. It's been a tradition for us ever since I turned 11. But here's a secret:

I've never bowled a game in my life.

I began going when I was 11 because that's when I was old enough to adroitly wipe down a table and spray Windex on a window without making a mess. Every Saturday night from 10pm to 4am, after entering the bowling alley through a back door, my parents dispatch my older sister Marlene and me to the lanes armed with broomsticks.

"Try to clean around the bowlers," she always says.

We always do.

In 2003 my family's stability was put to the test when my father suffered an accident: he was bitten by a horse and unable to work for three years. Some months later my year-old baby sister was hit by a car. My mother was our only financial support, so we often ate Cup of Noodles for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I prayed every night that things got [sic] better but first they got worse.

In the eleventh grade my father suffered a muscle failure and my mother was diagnosed with a tumor. Due to my parents' health problems I took on more responsibilities, sometimes missing school to care for my younger sisters and helping my father and mother at their work. Unfortunately, I pushed myself so hard that I ended up hurting myself, suffering a vein [sic] leakage in my brain. I was the fighter, the protector, and now I found myself needing someone to protect me. I was glad to have my mother by my side because she gave the strength I needed.

After some rest, I returned to school more focused than ever on preparing for my future. I got involved in Leadership Council where I'm now part of the civic's committee, planning events such as Day at the Park and school dances. I've also become a big supporter of the Gay Straight Alliance that deals with anti-bullying, and through this club I've given presentations that address unfairness and promote equity. But perhaps my biggest support system has come through the four years on my high school soccer team, where my commitment and love for soccer won me the captain position for the past two years.

I know I'm not like many students my age, but I'm happy with who I am. I am the student who works on the weekends scrubbing restrooms, carrying trash bags and mopping kitchen floors. I am the student who won't give a second thought to missing a party to help my parents babysit my sisters or accompany them to a new job. I know that one day I will not take my family to a bowling alley to clean it but to enjoy it.

And who knows, maybe one day I will learn to bowl.
Stomach Whisperer

By a student who **did not** face significant challenges and **did know** what she wanted to study.

I could taste tangy cinnamon, a dash of extra vanilla, the raw flavor of molasses, all overlaid with the smooth creamy base of buttermilk batter. I'd just eaten my first bite of my grandmother's spice cake. That night, I lay with my ear against her stomach, listening to her digestion as she told me a bedtime story. Drowsily, I wondered if the echoing gurgle I'd just heard was caused by the molasses or by the cinnamon.

In the ensuing years, I never thought too much about the days when I was the Stomach Whisperer. Cooking everything I could get a recipe for, and navigating by trial and error where no recipes were found, I took advantage of my ability to pick out ingredients in what I ate. Gradually, that early curiosity regarding the destiny of what we eat soon evolved into an intense love of science.

In high school, I fed my interest in science. Classes like Biology weren't simply lectures designed to drill knowledge into my head; they were an experience. What I learned in science became intermingled with how I saw my environment; I could clearly picture my surroundings as the sum of billions of cells working together, or grasp how nitrogen fixation fit into the biogeochemical cycle.

But regardless of my new curiosity about science, I tended to second guess myself, especially during labs. A snarky voice inside me whispered that I couldn't find success in science if I had no self-confidence, or if I kept questioning whether or not I was doing a lab right. Tentative goals were forming in my mind, visions of a white coat with my name embossed on it, but I told myself that becoming a doctor was a ridiculous aspiration for a cook.

Suddenly, during junior year, my beliefs about my scientific capabilities underwent a metamorphosis. I was introduced to a new type of lab: specimen dissections. Lab handouts were scarce on instructions; once we delved into the anatomy of the stomach, they became little more than pictorial references. When asked to obtain a sample of stomach epithelium, I could make a lateral incision along the pylorus of the stomach or choose to slice open the fundus along the greater curvature. I was gleefully awed. Not only was I exploring the organ that I found most interesting, but I was actually doing a good job at it. No matter which way I chose to dissect, my eyes were opened to the fact that I had the capacity to be an independent thinker, someone who didn't necessarily need the instructions.

Armed with a newfound degree of self-assurance, I applied and was accepted to an internship at the Simi Dermatological Group. My assumption had been that when doctors see a patient, they deliberate briefly on treatment, and then prescribe whatever care is necessary. But interning showed me how very wrong I was. Patients came in daily with skin conditions that the doctors couldn't diagnose immediately. I saw that before they prescribed treatment, stellar doctors saw patients as a mixture of physical and mental parts, not just equations to plug various medicines into.

As a matter of fact, breaking a spice cake down to ingredients, I realized, isn't all that different from what a doctor does when diagnosing a patient. And in the future, I'll be combining cooking and science by becoming a gastroenterologist. With a wide array of gastric disorders to treat, from gastritis to polyps, I'll have to be self-assured, so my patients can get the best care possible. Still, each patient won't have a recipe that I can follow to cure them, so I'll draw on the thinking of the little girl in the kitchen, using what I know to make my own recipes. And simultaneously, I'll always be able to incorporate the mindset of the girl wondering whether cinnamon or molasses was the cause of that gastric condition.
Scrapbook

By a student who did not face challenges and did not know what he wanted to study.

I look at the ticking, white clock: it’s eleven at night, my prime time. I clear the carpet of the Sony camera charger, the faded Levi’s, and last week’s Statistics homework. Having prepared my work space, I pull out the big, blue box and select two 12 by 12 crème sheets of paper. The layouts of the pages are already imprinted in my mind, so I simply draw them on scratch paper. Now I can really begin.

Cutting the first photograph, I make sure to leave a quarter inch border. Then paste it onto a polka-dotted green paper with a glue stick. For a sophisticated touch, I use needle and thread to sew the papers together. Loads of snipping and pasting later, the clock reads three in the morning. I look down at the final product, a full spread of photographs and cut-out shapes. As usual, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride as I brush my fingers over the crisp papers and the glossy photographs. For me, the act of taking pieces of my life and putting them together on a page is my way of organizing remnants of my past to make something whole and complete. This particular project is the most valuable scrapbook I have ever made: the scrapbook of my life.

In the center of the first page are the words MY WORLD in periwinkle letters. The entire left side I have dedicated to the people in my life. All four of my Korean grandparents sit in the top corner; they are side by side on a sofa for my first birthday — my doi. Underneath them are my seven cousins from my mom’s side. They freeze, trying not to let go of their overwhelming laughter while they play “red light, green light” at O’ Malvern Park, three miles up the hill behind my house. Meanwhile, my Texas cousins watch Daniel, the youngest, throw autumn leaves into the air that someone had spent hours raking up. To the right, my school peers and I miserably pose for our history teacher who could not resist taking a picture when he saw our droopy faces the morning of our first AP exam. The biggest photograph, of course, is that of my family, huddled in front of the fireplace while drinking my brother’s hot cocoa and listening to the pitter patter of rain outside our window.

I move over to the right side of the page. At the top, I have neatly sewn on three items. The first is a page of a Cambodian Bible that was given to each of the soldiers at a military base where I taught English. Beneath it is the picture of my Guatemalan girls and me sitting on the dirt ground while we devour arroz con pollo, red sauce slathered all over our lips. I re-read the third item, a short note that a student at a rural elementary school in Korea had struggled to write in her broken English. I lightly touch the little chain with a dangling letter E included with the note. Moving to the lower portion of the page, I see the photo of the shelf with all my ceramic projects gleaming in vibrant hues. With great pride, I have added a clipping of my page from the Mirror, our school newspaper, next to the ticket stubs for Wicked from my date with Dad. I make sure to include a photo of my first scrapbook page of the visit to Hearst Castle in fifth grade.

After proudly looking at each detail, I turn to the next page, which I’ve labeled: AND BEYOND. Unlike the previous one, this page is not cluttered or crowded. There is my college diploma with the major listed as International Relations; however, the name of the school is obscure. A miniature map covers nearly half of the page with numerous red stickers pinpointing locations all over the world, but I cannot recognize the countries’ names. The remainder of the page is a series of frames and borders with simple captions underneath. Without the photographs, the descriptions are cryptic.

For now, that second page is incomplete because I have no precise itinerary for my future. The red flags on the map represent the places I will travel to, possibly to teach English like I did in Cambodia or to do charity work with children like I did in Guatemala. As for the empty frames, I hope to fill them with the people I will meet: a family of my own and the families I desire to help, through a career I have yet to decide. Until I am able to do all that, I can prepare. I am in the process of making the layout and gathering the materials so that I can start piecing together the next part, the next page of my life’s scrapbook.
How Traveling and Language Have Shaped My Life

When I was very little, I caught the travel bug. It started after my grandparents first brought me to their home in France and I have now been to twenty-nine different countries. Each has given me a unique learning experience.

At five, I marveled at the Eiffel Tower in the City of Lights. When I was eight, I stood in the heart of Piazza San Marco feeding flocks of pigeons, then gazed down Venetian waterways on sleek gondolas. At thirteen, I saw the ancient megalithic structure of Stonehenge and walked along the Great Wall of China, amazed that the thousand-year-old stones were still in place.

It was through exploring cultures around the world that I first became interested in language. It began with French, which taught me the importance of pronunciation. I remember once asking a store owner in Paris where Rue des Pyramides was. But when I pronounced it PYR-a-mides instead of pyr-A-mides, with more accent on the A, she looked at me bewildered.

In the eighth grade, I became fascinated with Spanish and aware of its similarities with English through cognates. Baseball in Spanish, for example, is beisbol, which looks different but sounds nearly the same. This was incredible to me as it made speech and comprehension more fluid, and even today I find that cognates come to the rescue when I forget how to say something in Spanish.

Then, in high school, I developed an enthusiasm for Chinese. As I studied Chinese at my school, I marveled how if just one stroke was missing from a character, the meaning is lost. I loved how long words were formed by combining simpler characters, so Huo (火) meaning fire and Shen (山) meaning mountain can be joined to create Huoshan (火山), which means volcano. I love spending hours at a time practicing the characters and I can feel the beauty and rhythm as I form them.

Interestingly, after studying foreign languages, I was further intrigued by my native tongue. Through my love of books and fascination with developing a sesquipedalian lexicon (learning big words), I began to expand my English vocabulary. Studying the definitions prompted me to inquire about their origins, and suddenly I wanted to know all about etymology, the history of words. My freshman year I took a world history class and my love for history grew exponentially. To me, history is like a great novel, and it is especially fascinating because it took place in my own world.

But the best dimension that language brought to my life is interpersonal connection. When I speak with people in their native language, I find I can connect with them on a more intimate level. I’ve connected with people in the most unlikely places, finding a Bulgarian painter to use my few Bulgarian words with in the streets of Paris, striking up a conversation in Spanish with an Indian woman who used to work at the Argentinian embassy in Mumbai, and surprising a library worker by asking her a question in her native Mandarin.

I want to study foreign language and linguistics in college because, in short, it is something that I know I will use and develop for the rest of my life. I will never stop traveling, so attaining fluency in foreign languages will only benefit me. In the future, I hope to use these skills as the foundation of my work, whether it is in international business, foreign diplomacy, or translation.

I think of my journey as best expressed through a Chinese proverb that my teacher taught me, “I am like a chicken eating at a mountain of rice.” Each grain is another word for me to learn as I strive to satisfy my unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

Today, I still have the travel bug, and now, it seems, I am addicted to language too.

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Punk Rock Philosopher

I am on Oxford Academy's Speech and Debate Team, in both the Parliamentary Debate division and the Lincoln-Douglas debate division. I write screenplays, short stories, and opinionated blogs and am a regular contributor to my school's literary magazine, The Quillstick. I have accumulated over 300 community service hours that includes work at homeless shelters, libraries, and special education youth camps. I have been evaluated by the College Board and have placed within the top percentile.

But I am not any of those things. I am not a test score, nor a debater, nor a writer. I am an anti-nihilist punk rock philosopher. And I became so when I realized three things:

1) That the world is ruled by underwear. There is a variety of underwear for a variety of people. You have your ironed briefs for your businessmen, your soft cottons for the average, and hemp-based underwear for your environmental romantics. But underwear do not only tell us about who we are, they also influence our daily interactions in ways most of us don’t even understand. For example, I have a specific pair of underwear that is holy, worn out but surprisingly comfortable. And despite how trivial underwear might be, when I am wearing my favorite pair, I feel as if I am on top of the world. In any case, these articles of clothing affect our being and are the unsung heroes of comfort.

2) When I realized I cannot understand the world. I recently debated at the Orange County Speech League Tournament, within the Parliamentary Division. This specific branch of debate is an hour long, and consists of two parties debating either side of a current political issue. In one particular debate, I was assigned the topic: “Should Nation States eliminate nuclear arms?” It so happened that I was on the negative side and it was my job to convince the judges that countries should continue manufacturing nuclear weapons. During the debate, something strange happened: I realized that we are a special breed of species, that so much effort and resources are invested to ensure mutual destruction. And I felt that this debate in a small college classroom had elucidated something much more profound about the scale of human existence. In any case, I won 1st place at the tournament, but as the crowd cheered when my name was called to stand before an audience of hundreds of other debaters, and I flashed a victorious smile at the camera, I couldn’t help but imagine that somewhere at that moment a nuclear bomb was being manufactured, adding to an ever-growing stockpile of doom. And that’s when I realized that the world was something I will never understand.

3) When I realized I was a punk rocker philosopher. One summer night, my friend took me to an underground hardcore punk rock show. It was inside a small abandoned church. After the show, we met and became a part of this small community. Many were lost and on a constant soul-search, and to my surprise, many, like myself, did not have a blue Mohawk or a nose piercing. Many were just ordinary people discussing Nietzsche, string theory, and governmental ideologies. Many were also artists creating promotional posters and inventive slogans for stickers. They were all people my age who could not afford to be part of a record label and did something extraordinary by playing in these abandoned churches, making their own CDs and making thousands of promotional buttons by hand. I realized then that punk rock is not about music nor is it a guy with a blue Mohawk screaming protests. Punkrock is an attitude, an ascetic, and very much a culture. It is an antagonist to the conventional. It means making the best with what you have to contribute to a community. This was when I realized that I was a punk rock philosopher.

The world I come from consists of underwear, nuclear bombs, and punk rockers. And I love this world. My world is inherently complex, mysterious, and anti-nihilist. I am David Phan, somebody who spends his weekends debating in a three piece suit, other days immersed within the punk rock culture, and some days writing opinionated blogs about underwear.

But why college? I want a higher education. I want more than just the textbook fed classrooms in high school. A community which prizes revolutionary ideals, a sharing of multi-disciplinary perspectives, an environment that ultimately acts as a medium for movement, similar to the punk rock community I do not see college as a mere stepping stone for a stable career or a prosperous life, but as a supplement for knowledge and self-empowerment; it is a social engine that will jettison us to our next paradigm shift.
Barbie vs. Terrorism and the Patriarchy

Much of my early knowledge of how the world works was formed through countless hours spent playing with Barbie dolls. My sister, Taylor, and I had a plethora of toys, filling our basement’s cabinets and often littering our brightly checkered IKEA rug, but Barbie was our favorite. We gave her choppy, unfortunate haircut, houses constructed out of large wooden dominos, and a variety of cars—a neon orange truck, a convertible with a bubblegum-pink steering wheel, and a Volkswagen Beetle with a missing back tire.

Above the basement, the kitchen radio spewed out information—the news of the 9/11 attacks on our friends’ parents at the Pentagon, the War in Afghanistan, and the D.C. area snipers’ attacks on our entire community—but Taylor and I had trouble understanding what the information meant.

As my mom drove me to a doctor’s appointment, our local station announced that the snipers had shot someone just miles away. After I “raced” her inside into the waiting room, I soaked in the murmur about guns, a white van, and two very bad men. In the car ride home, I asked her a myriad of questions about terrorism including, “Do bullets go through glass?” Her responses left me still craving answers, so I took matters into my own hands. At five years old, I decided to enlist Barbie in the army.

While I fought against my penetrating fear of the world outside our haven of toys, Barbie herself fought against the very terrorism I was afraid of. In what we called our “Barbie Afghanistan,” Taylor and I worked through our confusion by making Barbie fight the battles, still wearing her high heels and ball gowns.

I no longer play with Barbie, but she has fought another war in my adolescence. I’m a passionate feminist, and my opinions about Barbie have caused an internal tug-of-war on my beliefs. As I sit in my basement now, surrounded by books and my laptop, I have just as many questions as I did at five years old.

I’ve desperately attempted to consolidate my opposing opinions of Barbie into a single belief, but I’ve accepted that they’re separate. In one, she has perpetuated physical ideals unrepresentative of how real female bodies are built. Striving to look like Barbie is not only striving for the impossible—the effort is detrimental to women’s psychological and physical health, including my own. In the other, Barbie has inspired me in her breaking of the plastic ceiling. She has dabbled in close to 150 careers, including some I’d love to have: a UNICEF Ambassador, teacher, and business executive. And although it’s not officially listed on her résumé, Barbie served honorably in the War in Afghanistan.

Barbie has proven to be an 11.5-inch-tall embodiment of both what frustrates and excites me. From terrorism to feminism and beyond, I am vexed by the complexities of the world but eager to piece things together. Although I’m frustrated by what I can’t understand, I’ve realized that confusion is okay.

With Barbie as my weapon, I’ve continued to fight in the many “wars” in my life. I’ve found great value in the questions I ask and in my attempts to reconcile our world’s inevitable contradictions. Things can be innocent yet mature, they can be detrimental yet empowering, and they can even wear high heels and a ball gown while fighting in a war.
I Shot My Brother

From page 57 of the maroon notebook sitting on my mahogany desk:

"Then Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me." - Genesis 4:13

"Here is a secret that no one in my family knows: I shot my brother when I was six. Luckily, it was a BB gun. But to this day, my older brother Jonathan does not know who shot him. And I have finally promised myself to confess this eleven year old secret to him after I write this essay.

The truth is, I was always jealous of my brother. Our grandparents, with whom we lived as children in Daegu, a rural city in South Korea, showered my brother with endless accolades: he was bright, athletic, and charismatic.

"Why can't you be more like Jon?" my grandmother used to nag, pointing at me with a carrot stick. To me, Jon was just cocky. He would scoff at me when he would beat me in basketball, and when he brought home his painting of Bambi with the teacher's sticker "Awesome!" on top, he would make several copies of it and showcase them on the refrigerator door. But I retreated to my desk where a pile of "Please draw this again and bring it to me tomorrow" papers lay, desperate for immediate treatment. Later, I even refused to attend the same elementary school and wouldn't even eat meals with him.

Deep down I knew I had to get the chip off my shoulder. But I didn't know how.

That is, until March 11th, 2001.

That day around six o'clock, juvenile combatants appeared in Kyung Mountain for their weekly battle, with cheeks smeared in mud and empty BB guns in their hands. The Korean War was not over yet for the young guerrillas; they fought to the death in the streets of Seoul, where I had lived my entire childhood. My friend Min-young had been killed in this battle, and I hid behind a willow tree, eagerly awaiting our orders.

Beside us, our comrades were dying, each falling on the ground crying in agony, their hands clasping their "wounds." Suddenly a wish for heroism surged within me: I grabbed Min-young's arms and rushed towards the enemies' headquarters, disobeying our orders to remain secret duty. To tip the tide in the war, I had to kill their captain. We infiltrated the enemy lines, narrowly dodging each attack. We then cleared the pillars of asparagus ferns until the Captain's lair came into view. I quickly pulled my clueless friend back into the bush.

Hearing us, the alarmed captain turned around. It was my brother.

He saw Min-young's right arm sticking out from the bush and hurled a "grenade," (a rock), bruising his arm.

"That's not fair!" I roared in the loudest and most unrecognizable voice I could manage.

Startled, the Captain and his generals abandoned their post. Vengeance replaced my wish for heroism and I took off after the fleeing perpetrator. Streams of sweat ran down my face and I pursued him for several minutes until suddenly I was arrested by a small, yellow sign that read in Korean: DO NOT TRESPASS: Bear Traps Ahead. (Two summers ago, my five year old cousin, who insisted on joining the ranks, had wandered off course during the battle; we found him at the bottom of a 20 ft deep pit with a deep gash in his forehead and shirt soaked in blood) "Hey, stop!" I shouted, heart pounding. "STOP! My mind froze. My eyes just gazed at the fleeing object; what should I do?

I looked on as my shivering hand reached for the canister of BBs. The next second, I heard two shots followed by a cry. I opened my eyes just enough to see two village man carrying my brother away from the warning sign. I turned around, hurled my BB gun into the nearby Kyung Creek and ran home as fast as I could.

***

Days passed. My brother and I did not talk about the incident.

"Maybe he knew it was me," I thought in fear as I tried to eavesdrop on his conversation with grandpa one day. When the door suddenly opened, I blurted, "Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing," he said pushing past me, "Just a rough sleep."

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But in the next few weeks, something was happening inside me.
All the jealousy and anger I'd once felt had been replaced by a new feeling: guilt.
That night when my brother was gone I went to a local store and bought a piece of chocolate taffy, his favorite. I returned home and placed it on my brother's bed with a note attached: "Love, Grandma."
Several days later, I secretly went into his room and folded his unkempt pajamas.
Then, other things began to change. We began sharing clothes (something we had never done), started watching Pokemon episodes together, and then, on his ninth birthday, I did something with Jon that I hadn't done in six years: I ate dinner with him. I even ate fishcakes, which he loved but I hated. And I didn't complain.
Today, my brother is one of my closest friends. Every week I accompany him to Carlson Hospital where he receives treatment for his obsessive compulsive disorder and schizophrenia. While in the waiting room, we play a noisy game of Zenga, comment on the Lakers' performance or listen to the radio on the registrar's desk.
Then, the door to the doctor's office opens.
"Jonathan Lee, please come in."
I tap his shoulder and whisper, "Rock it, bro."
After he leaves, I take out my notebook and begin writing where I left off.
Beside me, the receptionist's fingers hover over the radio in search of a new station, eventually settling on one. I hear LeAnn Rimes singing "Amazing Grace." Her voice slowly rises over the noise of the bustling room.
"Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear. And Grace, my fears relieved..."
Smiling, I open Jon's Jansport backpack and neatly place this essay inside and a chocolate taffy with a note attached.

Twenty minutes have passed when the door abruptly opens.
"Guess what the doctor just said?" my brother cries, unable to hide his exhilaration.

I look up and I smile too.
Dead Bird

Smeared blood, shredded feathers. Clearly, the bird was dead. But wait, the slight fluctuation of its chest, the slow blinking of its shiny black eyes. No, it was alive.

I had been typing an English essay when I heard my cat's loud meows and the flutter of wings. I had turned slightly at the noise and had found the barely breathing bird in front of me.

The shock came first. Mind racing, heart beating faster, blood draining from my face. I instinctively reached out my hand to hold it, like a long-lost keepsake from my youth. But then I remembered that birds had life, flesh, blood.

Death. Dare I say it out loud? Here, in my own home?

Within seconds, my reflexes kicked in. Get over the shock. Gloves, napkins, towels. Band-aid? How does one heal a bird? I rummaged through the house, keeping a wary eye on my cat. Donning yellow rubber gloves, I tentatively picked up the bird. Never mind the cat's hissing and protesting scratches, you need to save the bird. You need to ease its pain.

But my mind was blank. I stroked the bird with a paper towel to clear away the blood, see the wound. The wings were crumpled, the feet mangled. A large gash extended close to its jugular, rendering its breathing shallow, unstable. The rising and falling of its small breast slowed. Was the bird dying? No, please, not yet.

Why was this feeling so familiar, so tangible?

Oh. Yes. The long drive, the green hills, the white church, the funeral. The Chinese mass, the resounding amens, the flower arrangements. Me, crying silently, huddled in the corner. The Hsieh family huddled around the casket. Apologies. So many apologies. Finally, the body lowered to rest. The body. Kari Hsieh. Still familiar, still tangible.

Hugging Mrs. Hsieh, I was a ghost, a statue. My brain and my body competed. Emotion wrestled with fact. Kari Hsieh, aged 17, my friend of four years, had died in the Chatsworth Metrolink Crash on Sep. 14, 1999. Kari was dead, I thought. Dead.

But I could still save the bird.

My frantic actions heightened my senses, mobilized my spirit. Cupping the bird, I ran outside, hoping the cool air outdoors would stifle every wound, cause the bird to miraculously fly away. Yet there lay the bird in my hands, still gasping, still dying. Bird, human, human, bird. What was the difference? Both were the same. Mortal.

But couldn't I do something? Hold the bird longer, de-claw the cat? I wanted to go to my bedroom, confine myself to tears, replay my memories, never come out.

The bird's warmth faded away. Its heartbeat slowed along with its breath. For a long time, I stared thoughtlessly at it, so still in my hands.

Slowly, I dug a small hole in the black earth. As it disappeared under handfuls of dirt, my own heart grew stronger, my own breath more steady.

The wind, the sky, the dampness of the soil on my hands whispered to me, "The bird is dead. Kari has passed. But you are alive." My breath, my heartbeat, my sweet sighed back, "I am alive. I am alive. I am alive."