

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

Admission Essay to New York University

By Nora Becker

When I first met Ethan at Score!, I was fifteen. He was ten. I remember him mightily pushing open the heavy doors and announcing in a loud voice that he had arrived. His appearance took me off guard; he had a gawky uncoordinated body, a crooked smile filled with different colored braces, and bulky brown glasses. Rarely did anyone enter Score!, the learning center for children where I had recently begun working, with such enthusiasm. I wondered why none of my co-workers seemed to notice. After all, Ethan wasn't the typical embarrassed child, forced to come by his parents. As a sophomore in high school, I did not have any experience teaching kids with special needs. Ethan was my first exposure to it, and initially, it was hard not to get frustrated with him; he was loud, clumsy, and disruptive. Occasionally he would get so out of hand that his parents would need to be contacted. Once when he got a good mark on his spelling unit, he leapt out of his seat and began loudly celebrating, only to be met with looks of disapproval from the other employees. But when his parents came, also shaking their heads at him, he refused to leave before he had completed his lessons.

One day Ethan confided in me that he got picked on a lot. "It's because I have a little stutter," he explained in a meek voice. Immediately I knew that this was one of those sensitive moments where it is incumbent on the adult to say just the right thing to make the child feel better. It's the type of thing that's not so hard if you're a psychologist in practice twenty years. But since I lacked the degree and the years, I just said the first thing that came to mind. "Everyone stutters." He looked up at me. "Not really. That's not what I meant to say. I mean that everyone has something about them that seems weird to other people." Uy. Was I making him feel worse? "You're smarter than them anyway," I added, trying to look at him encouragingly. In response, he only muttered "okay" and continued to fidget with the computer keyboard.

There were many similar moments in the eight months I worked with Ethan, times when I could only guess at the proper way to handle the situation. These are the instances that stand out in my mind, more than the obvious successes and failures. These "lessons for the teacher" as my supervisor used to jokingly call them, all had two things in common: first, none of them involved math, and second, they left me feeling very confused. My most valuable lessons actually occurred in the pizza parlor next door to Score! where Ethan and I sometimes met before his appointment. There I got to know him for who he truly was: a tuba player, a coin collector, a lover of pizza-not a list of psychological ailments on a piece of paper.

To most people, Ethan's last appearance at Score! resembled his first almost exactly. A little figure could be seen pushing open the large glass doors, excitement in his voice as he called out my name. But I no longer saw an awkward, clumsy child; instead, I saw a friend, a unique person whose life had touched mine for a brief, but important moment.

(581 words)

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

College Admission Essay

By Rachel Tornheim

I tighten my fists and narrow my eyes at the invisible enemy in front of me. The sweat drips from my face and soaks through my crisp white *gi*. I struggle to breathe as I have been taught - in through the nose and out through the mouth - and bounce to the music, anticipating the instructor's shout.

"Move!"

My body springs into action. Backfist, reverse punch, front ball kick, hook, uppercut, double palm heel to the ribs. On the last strike I *kiai* with the rest of the students. Our yells fill the room, louder than the traffic outside and louder than the din from the stereo. The sound pounds inside my head. Drawing back, I assume the on-guard position. I am ready.

Karate has been a part of my life since 1994. My mom had been encouraging me to take up martial arts ever since she realized that my tiny size would make me an easy target, but it wasn't until seventh grade that I felt physically threatened and decided to sign up for karate classes. Although I no longer feel in danger at this school, karate has not gone the way of figure skating, horseback riding, and piano. It has stayed with me and become a part of my identity. I have paid for my brown belt with sweat and occasionally blood, with anxiety before tests, and with hours of exertion and exhaustion. My training has given me the ability to defend myself, a necessity for a four-foot-ten, slightly built woman entering the twenty-first century.

But karate has left me with more than aerobic and defensive abilities. Because of my physical limitations, defending against an attacker does not come easily to me. I cannot count the number of times I have been unable to evade the plastic knife wielded by my opponent or the number of bruises I have received from fists, feet, and knees. My aversion to failure and reluctance to trying unfamiliar things are obstacles I face in other aspects of my life, obstacles that my experience with karate has helped me to overcome. It has taught me that when you get knocked down, you get up again and keep fighting... Karate has boosted my confidence too. I have sparred with a professional body-builder, and there's nothing like the rush I get from bringing a 200-pound man to the floor!

As we kneel and meditate before each class, the teacher instructs us to clear our minds and leave our problems of work, school, and family outside the *dojo*. At first I don't think it's possible to avoid worrying about the freshman that I need to tutor, the science project that isn't finished, or the 6:45 AM flight I need to catch for this weekend's debate tournament. But somehow, every time, I forget these concerns. For one hour, I am only a *karateka*, a warrior.

(490 words)

Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

College Admission Essay

By Sanju Poudel

In summer 2003, my aunt suggested I deliver babies. That was what volunteering at her small town hospital in Bharatpur, Nepal meant to me anyway. The more she insisted, the more frustrated I became, fearing what I felt would be another one of my parents' ways for me to build character. My aunt, on the other hand, was determined to show me otherwise and literally dragged me to her work on a rickshaw. Throughout the ride, I did not hold back my aggravation. After all, what did I know about small time hospitals?

Nevertheless, I had certain expectations of the well-known hospital before entering. I pictured succeeding red-bricked buildings with tidy carpeted rooms and people arriving in cars for minor checkups. I imagined how in each room a doctor with a white lab coat and a stethoscope around his/neck would be consulting individual patients.

The very moment the rickshaw slid through the gate, however, my naïve conceptions dissolved into disease, disorder, and destitution, the truth of what was in front of me. Hesitating to get out of the rickshaw and step into a foreign world that was threatening to suppress my innocence, I closed my eyes. I closed my eyes to the make-shift wooden stretchers carrying frail men and women contemplating their inevitable deaths; I closed my eyes to a young girl with a tattered school uniform and undone ribbons leading a blind woman by the hand; I closed my eyes to the sorry, languishing environment that I did not want to be a part of.

My astonishment peaked when entering the maternity ward. In what I considered a room fit for two patients, there were *fifteen* women sprawled on rusting metal-framed beds and sheets on the floor. In the little gaps about the room were green plastic pans where the women would uncomfortably station themselves to urinate and vomit. I immediately imagined all of these women in nice comfortable beds in their own separate rooms which was the way *my* mom had given birth to my younger brother in New York.

The longer I stayed in the hospital, the more I wanted to reach out to these people. Although the hospital had initially been a place I was reluctant to approach, I ended up visiting everyday that week even if merely to speak to the patients. It was because of this day that I finally understood why my aunt refuses better paying jobs abroad. Her strong conviction of returning to her native land and using her education to help her *own* people has filtered into me. Before this event, I had always planned on living in New York, indulging in its luxuries and finding a career with a lucrative salary. Now, however, the prospect of going back to my country and living among a community I can lend a hand to is much more appealing. At the end of the week, I was very thankful that my aunt had pushed me into an experience I now consider a crossroad in my life.

(508 words)

Sample essays with Common Application Prompts

Sample College Application Essay 1

You Be the Judge

Read the following application essay. See if you can figure out this essay's strengths and weaknesses. Then keep reading to see our critique.

The Essay #1

From the time I was able to realize what a university was, all I heard from my mother's side of the family was about the University of Michigan and the great heritage it has. Many a Saturday afternoon my grandfather would devote to me, by sitting me down in front of the television and reminiscing about the University of Michigan while halftime occurred during a Michigan Wolverines football game. Later, as I grew older and universities took on greater meaning, my mother and uncle, both alumni of the University of Michigan, took me to see their old stamping grounds. From first sight, the university looked frightening because of its size, but with such a large school comes diversity of people and of academic and non-academic events.

In Springfield High School, non-academic clubs such as the Future Physicians and the Pylon, both of which I have belonged to for two years, give me an opportunity to see both the business world and the medical world. These two clubs have given me a greater sense of what these careers may be like. In Future Physicians, I participated in field trips to children's hospitals and also participated in two blood banks.

Currently I hold a job at Maas Brothers. This lets me interact with people outside my own immediate environment. I meet different kinds of people, in different moods, with different attitudes, and with different values. This job teaches me to be patient with people, to have responsibility, and to appreciate people for what they are.

In the community I am active in my church Youth Group. As a high school sophomore, I was our church's representative to the Diocesan Youth Fellowship. I helped organize youth group events, the largest being "The Bishop's Ball," a state-wide event for 300 young people. I also played high school junior varsity soccer for two years. As a senior I will be playing varsity soccer, but in the off-season. As a junior I coached a girls' soccer team for the town. This gave me a great deal of responsibility because the care of twenty-four girls was put into my custody. It felt very satisfying to pass on the knowledge of soccer to another generation. The girls played teams from other parts of Florida. Though their record was 3-8, the girls enjoyed their season. This is what I taught them was the greatest joy of soccer.

The past three years of my life have given me greater visions of my future. I see the University of Michigan as holding a large book with many unread chapters and myself as an eager child who has just learned to read. I intend to read and probe into all the chapters. The University of Michigan offers me more than the great reputation of this fine school, but a large student body with diverse likes and dislikes, and many activities, both academic and non-academic, to participate in. With the help of the University of Michigan, I will be successful after college and be able to make a name and place for myself in our society.

The Critique

Admission officials consider how you write your essay, not just what you write about. Try to critique this essay using the topics below. After you critique the essay, I will show you what the admissions counselors thought..

The Introduction

Sample essays with Common Application Prompts

The introduction seems to have a lack of focus: Where's the writer going with this paragraph? Where's the writer going with this essay? Also, the writer needs to tighten the phrasing (e.g., "while halftime occurred" to "at halftime" or "From first sight" to "Immediately").

The Body

There is a very abrupt transition from the first paragraph to the second: How did we get from Michigan's diversity to the writer's clubs? The second paragraph also includes general statements with little evidence: How did these activities reveal career paths?

Can the writer be more specific? What does "participated in two blood banks" mean? Did he drive volunteers from across town, sign people in all day on three Saturdays every month except August or spend 15 minutes one Thursday afternoon in the nurse's office giving blood?

In the third paragraph, we have to ask: What does the writer do at Maas Brothers? "Interact" needs definition. What here shows that the writer has thought about the time spent at Maas Brothers? Also in this paragraph, there is a misspelling of different ("different"): The writer did not proofread thoroughly.

The information in the fourth paragraph (as well as the previous two paragraphs) appears elsewhere in the application. Essays that simply run down your accomplishments don't add to your application. And does the reader need to know that "the girls played teams from other parts of Florida"?

The writer would be better off focusing on one of the things discussed in this essay, such as working with the girls' soccer team. What he did to make Jennifer and Gretchen and Courtney enjoy soccer even though they won only three of their games would be more vivid and focused than a lot of talk about passing things on to future generations.

The Conclusion

The conclusion returns to the earlier idea of diversity at Michigan, but this idea was not developed in the body of the essay. It's not necessary to mention "the great reputation of this fine school." Instead, the writer should give specific, programmatic reasons Michigan offers the kind of education he needs.

Overall

This essay seems full of information and demonstrates basic essay organization, but it lacks focus and proof. The reader gets a laundry list of activities rather than a clear sense of who the writer is and what he cares and thinks about.

The writer also repeats some phrases. He mentions the "University of Michigan" six times and repeats "academic and non-academic" twice.

Adapted from [The College Application Essay](#) by Sarah Myers McGinty.

Sample College Application Essay 2

You Be the Judge

Read the following application essay. See if you can figure out this essay's strengths and weaknesses. Then keep reading to see our critique.

The Essay #2

My most important experience sought me out. It happened to me; I didn't cause it.

My preferred companions are books or music or pen and paper. I have only a small circle of close friends, few of whom get along together. They could easily be counted "misfits." To be plain, I found it quite easy to doubt my ability to have any sort of "close relationship."

After the closing festivities of Andover Summer School this past summer, on the night before we were scheduled to leave, a girl I had met during the program's course approached me. She came to my room and sat down on my bed and announced that she was debating with herself whether she wanted me to become her boyfriend. She wanted my reaction, my opinion.

I was startled, to say the least, and frightened. I instantly said, "No." I told her I on no account wanted this and that I would reject any gestures she made towards starting a relationship. I would ignore her entirely, if need be. I explained that I was a coward. I wanted nothing whatsoever to do with a relationship. I talked a lot and very fast.

To my surprise, she did not leave instantly. Instead, she hugged her knees and rocked back and forth on my bed. I watched her from across the room. She rocked, and I watched. Doubts crept up on me. Opportunity had knocked and the door was still locked. It might soon depart.

"I lied," I said. "I was afraid of what might happen if we became involved. But it's better to take the chance than to be afraid."

She told me she knew I had lied. I had made her realize, though, how much she actually wanted me to be her boyfriend. We decided to keep up a relationship after Andover.

Even then, I was not sure which had been the lie. Now I think that everything I said may have been true when I said it. But I'm still not sure.

I learned, that night, that I could be close to someone. I also realize, now, that it doesn't matter whether or not that person is a misfit; the only important thing is the feeling, the closeness, the connection. As long as there is something between two people — friendship, love, shared interests, whatever else — it is a sign that there can be some reconciliation with fear, some "fit" for misfits. And it shows that fear need not always win, that we can grow and change, and even have second chances.

I am still seeing her.

Over for The Critique

The Critique

Admission officials consider how you write your essay, not just what you write about. Try to critique your own essays in the same way this sample essay is critiqued below.

The Introduction

Sample essays with Common Application Prompts

The introduction is brief and memorable. The reader is drawn into the rest of the essay.

The Body

The second paragraph shows that the essay has a clear focus: his anxiety about relationships. The next two paragraphs use a style that is simple and direct. They employ short sentences and simple words to tell a simple story.

We see that he is thoughtful by the way he narrates the next several paragraphs. The story of his conversation with a girl is a way for the writer to show us about himself — that he's conservative and shy but willing to take a risk.

The Conclusion

He concludes with a strong summary paragraph and end sentence. Like his introduction, his ending is simple yet memorable.

Overall

Boyfriends and girlfriends can be risky essay topics. However, this writer skillfully employs the story of the beginning of a relationship to illustrate a larger point — the power of love to overcome fear.

This essay enriches an application full of academic achievements, scores and grades. It's definitely not something found elsewhere in the application. It's short and to the point. It's interesting because it's believable.

Adapted from [The College Application Essay](#) by Sarah Myers McGinty.