

College Essay Samples

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Normal

College Essay

Describe a significant person or experience that has had a profound effect on you and describe that effect.

Fitting in and being "normal" are probably the most important things in a child's life. Fitting in is not always easy, nor is it always worth the effort. Our differences are what make us unique and overcoming differences often make us better, more interesting people. Being diagnosed with a learning disability and ADD at nine years old profoundly changed both my life and how I view myself. Had this not happened, I might never have known the meaning of hard work and acceptance.

While I felt no different, I was forced to realize that I was different. My family just moved to a new school and fitting in could not have been more important to me. Everything started off fine. I made friends quickly and I was accepted into the social structure of the third grade. Although my year started off fantastically, it soon turned into a struggle to keep up in class. I remember my teacher pulling me aside many times to talk to me about my grades and behavior. Towards the end of the year, my parents and teacher decided to test me for ADD and learning disabilities. The test showed that I had a moderate case of ADD and a visual perceptuve learning disability. This emotionally destroyed me for the rest of my third grade year and most of my fourth grade year.

Being identified with a learning disability set me apart from the social group to which I wanted to belong. I was not "ok" being in the low reading group; I refused to receive help in the classroom. My lowest point came when my fourth grade teacher announced to my class "just because you have a learning disability doesn't mean you can carry your pencil through the hall." To this day I do not understand what she was getting at, but for me, the humiliation was complete. I struggled through the remainder of the year with the help of my family and a few great people at the school. I set my goal to make honor roll and not miss a day of 4th grade. I set this goal mainly to prove this teacher wrong and I achieved it! All along my parents kept saying "it's okay. All this means is that you have to work harder than some of your friends." This is an easy statement to make, but the reality of it was that I lost a great deal of self-esteem that year. I resented the fact that I could not get my homework done in the half hour it took my best friend. I was not in any of the academic groups that my friends were in, and most importantly, I felt stupid.

At the start of fifth grade I was all but ready to give up. I knew I needed to work, but had no motivation. As I got to know my teacher, I realized that he believed in my ability to persevere. Even though homework and school was not any easier for me, I was learning to hang in and believe in myself. As a result of my willingness to push myself and start to accept help, I received the Outstanding Student Achievement Award. This was a huge confidence boost for me because it showed me that with a little extra work, I

could achieve anything I wanted to! Soon after I went to junior high and I was on the honor roll both years.

I knew success would be a challenge for me entering high school. My parents' words come back to me all the time, "it just means you have to work harder." I say this to myself every time I sit down to write a paper or write up a lab experiment. I have learned that my ability to work hard and not be afraid sets me apart from many of my peers; but instead of this being a negative thing, I now view it as a positive trait. I have been able to rely on my ability to work hard and to be my own advocate. Even though I never got all "A's," I maintained a "B" average and mostly took honors classes. I accepted that my ADD and learning disability are things that will never go away, although at one time I felt they ruined my life. I now realize that they shaped me into a self-reliant person and a hard worker. I learned to accept myself, realized what I can change, and then I changed it. Simply put, the knowledge of what might be my greatest limitations can also be the door to my future.

The Golden Star

It all started when I was about four years old. I still remember it as though it were yesterday. I was lying face up on the living room floor, staring at a small spider and wondering why it could walk on the ceiling without falling off. Suddenly, the front door opened with a snap and my older sister came rushing in. I sat up as fast as I could to see where she was going and why she was running, or from whom. Coming to a halt in front of my surprised parents, who were in the kitchen, my sister withdrew a sheet of paper from her backpack and showed it to them. Both of my parents opened their mouths in amazement and I, full of curiosity, went to find out what was so special about that paper. Standing behind my Dad and looking over his right shoulder, I noticed a big golden star stamped on the right-hand corner of a page, full of what appeared to be numbers. Confused, I asked my big sister what the star meant and whether I could get one too. Somehow, the star seemed to have a special meaning. With a smile from ear to ear, my sister explained, "It is a 'well-done' star. My teacher gave it to me because I did an excellent job in my math test. No, you can't get one because you're not at school yet." I, surprisingly, was more puzzled than ever. My sister did not like mathematics. She hated it. So, how come she got a "well-done" star? Then, I remembered. My sister studied very hard for that test for two or three weeks. I saw her in our room, the math book opened in front of her, struggling to find the answers to difficult problems.

It was from that moment on that I knew there was something important about school and learning. I wanted to have a golden star to show-off to my parents. My sister, always comprehensive, knew what was going through my mind. She began to teach me everything she knew or had learned after she came home from school. I was her only student, but she did not mind. Together, we built a small classroom out of wood and cardboard in the backyard — she had patience, skill with building stuff, and I admired her for it. My sister was a very dedicated teacher and I was eager to learn everything she would teach me. Every time she stood in front of me, next to the wooden board where she wrote with pieces of charcoal, I felt like I was about to learn everything. I did not care whether it was the alphabet, the colors, the numbers, or a simple reading lesson; I would try to take it all in. My favorite lesson was math, however, and I enjoyed all those afternoons counting up scurrying ants, adding up wooden sticks, multiplying small

stones, diving apples, or subtracting money. Most of the time, my sister watched over me while I worked on my own. She understood that I preferred to give my best effort, to gain experience, and to learn from my mistakes. When I started to get upset, or when I could not learn something fast enough, my sister calmed me down and encouraged me. I liked and accepted my sister's good advice because I knew I was not perfect. I had weaknesses and flaws like everybody else, and I still do. She always told me that I must not force myself to learn it all at once, that learning takes time, dedication, and effort. I think that is one of the most important things I learned from her.

When I finally went to school, I was so impatient to get a golden star. I wanted my parents to be proud of me like the way they were proud of my sister when she earned hers. Unfortunately, things were not as easy as I thought they would be. It took me quite a long time to adjust to my new teacher's way of educating. Thanks to my sister's comforting words, however, I began to be patient. At last, after about four months after I started first grade, my math teacher stamped a shiny golden star on my test. I felt happy and proud to be the owner of such a star. I remember that my best friend, the smartest student in the class who earned a golden star before, congratulated me and when she told me, "You deserved it," I felt my heart swell with happiness. She and I knew that I had worked hard. At school, when our teacher returned our tests to us and there was not a golden star on mine, she used to tell me, "If you fail, try again." This saying, even though it was not funny, made us laugh a lot because we were both stubborn and would always keep on trying and trying. At home, I showed the test to my parents, my two younger brothers, and especially, to my sister who was as happy as I was. As a sign of gratitude for everything I learned, I gave my first golden star to her. I knew she would take good care of it and would keep it safely for as long as possible. Now every time I get upset because I do not think I am working hard enough, the golden star flashes through my mind. It reminds me of my sister and the most important thing I learned from her: "It doesn't matter what you're being taught, but what you learn from it."

Sample Essay #1

Accepted by Princeton

Hiking to Understanding

Surrounded by thousands of stars, complete silence, and spectacular mountains, I stood atop New Hampshire's Presidential Range awestruck by nature's beauty. Immediately, I realized that I must dedicate my life to understanding the causes of the universe's beauty. In addition, the hike taught me several valuable lessons that will allow me to increase my understanding through scientific research.

Although the first few miles of the hike up Mt. Madison did not offer fantastic views, the vistas became spectacular once I climbed above tree line. Immediately, I sensed that understanding the natural world parallels climbing a mountain. To reach my goal of total comprehension of natural phenomena, I realized that I must begin with knowledge that may be uninteresting by itself. However, this knowledge will form the foundation of an accurate view of the universe. Much like every step while hiking leads the hiker nearer the mountain peak, all knowledge leads the scientist nearer total understanding.

Above tree line, the barrenness and silence of the hike taught me that individuals must have their own direction. All hikers know that they must carry complete maps to reach their destinations; they do not allow others to hold their maps for them. Similarly, surrounded only by mountains, sky, and silence, I recognized the need to remain individually focused on my life's goal of understanding the physical universe.

At the summit, the view of the surrounding mountain range is spectacular. The panorama offers a view of hills and smaller mountains. Some people during their lives climb many small hills. However, to have the most accurate view of the world, I must be dedicated to climbing the biggest mountains I can find. Too often people simply hike across a flat valley without ascending because they content themselves with the scenery. The mountain showed me that I cannot content myself with the scenery. When night fell upon the summit, I stared at the slowly appearing stars until they completely filled the night sky. Despite the windy conditions and below freezing temperatures, I could not tear myself away from the awe-inspiring beauty of the cosmos. Similarly, despite the frustration and difficulties inherent in scientific study, I cannot retreat from my goal of universal understanding.

When observing Saturn's rising, the Milky Way Cloud, and the Perseid meteor shower, I simultaneously felt a great sense of insignificance and purpose. Obviously, earthly concerns are insignificant to the rest of the universe. However, I experienced the overriding need to understand the origins and causes of these phenomena. The hike also strengthened my resolve to climb the mountain of knowledge while still taking time to gaze at the wondrous scenery. Only then can the beauty of the universe and the study of science be purposefully united. Attaining this union is my lifelong goal.

Sample Essay #2

Accepted by Cornell

Question: Tell us about an opinion have you had to defend. How has this affected your belief system?

I chuckle to myself every time I think about this. I am perceived as a mild-mannered, intelligent individual until I mention that I am involved in riflery. It is interesting to watch someone's expression change. It is as if I instantaneously grew a pair of horns and a sharp set of claws. Believe me this gets worst; I am a member of the NRA. I try to tell these folks that I belong to the NRA to fire my rifle. "Oh my God! You fire real guns? With real bullets?!" they remark with a perplexed look on their face. Besides having horns and claws, I now possess a tail and leathery wings.

This is how it began five years ago. I had played on a soccer team for several years. As I grew older I began having difficulty playing soccer because of shortness of breath. I was diagnosed as having mild asthma which ended my soccer career and eliminated my participation in most physical sports.

Shortly afterward, during a Boy Scout summer camp, I participated in riflery at their shooting range. This was the first time I had ever touched a firearm. To my amazement, I won the camp's first place award for marksmanship. I was more than eager when a friend of mine asked me if I would like to join a shooting club.

My parents were wary when I asked to join the rifle club. My mother feared guns, but my father felt there was no problem with trying this sport. Gratefully, he gave me the opportunity to try rifle marksmanship, despite secretly hoping that I would quit. Both of my parents were afraid of what people would think about their son's involvement with guns.

Like my parents a majority of people believe that all firearms are dangerous to our society. All they remember are the hysterical news releases of street violence and injured children. I am often asked how many deer I've shot. Frankly, I could never bring myself to injure another living creature and neither would most of the competitors I have met. Yet, I keep finding myself defending the sport from all of the misconceptions that surround it. Most people have developed a negative impression of the sport and I have found that these prejudices are difficult, if not impossible, to rectify.

Because of this conflict, I have become an open minded individual. I express my opinions without reservation, and I have learned to accept opinions and viewpoints contrary to my own. I do not intend to alter what I enjoy because of the ignorance of friends and acquaintances. If people have a negative view of me simply because of the sport I am active in, then they must be so superficial that they cannot see the person who I really am. I am no longer apprehensive of being perceived as a gun toting, trigger happy fanatic, even though I still endeavor to educate my friends and relatives on the beauty of this sport.