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Personal college essay examples

When you're applying to college, all of the different steps can feel overwhelming. One of the things students dread most is writing their personal statement. But, by reading personal statement examples and examples of college essays that worked, students can learn what makes a great college essay. Likewise, reading personal essay examples can help you get inspired to write your own! Personal statement examples show the wide variety of essays that students write. All personal statement examples are unique to each student. However, there is a prevailing theme among them all. In each, the student tells a story that communicates something about themselves, their background, and/or their values. The meaning of a personal statement essay and personal statement examples. Different personal statement essay prompts. How our personal statement examples vary. How to write a personal statement using these personal essay examples. What makes a personal statement stand out? Tips for writing your best personal essay. Before we get into the personal statement examples, let's start by further defining the subject at hand. To understand personal statement essay examples, you need to answer the question, "what is a personal statement?" As you'll see in these personal statement essay examples, the personal statement is an essay of around 500-650 words. This essay serves as the main point of communication between you and the admissions committee. It's sometimes referred to as a college essay, personal essay, or Common App essay. But, beyond its word count and nicknames, what is a personal statement? The personal statement is the cover letter to your college application. It's your chance to speak to the admissions committee in your own voice. The personal statement lets you show who you are outside of or in addition to your grades, recommendation letters, and extracurriculars. Since personal essays are so unique to the individual, there's no one way to write them. As you'll see in the personal statement examples, students approach personal essays in many different manners. Now that we've answered the question "what is a personal statement?", let's go over when you'll need to write a personal statement. We promise the personal statement examples we've compiled in this article will be useful. In fact, almost all colleges require you to write a personal statement. However, depending on what application you're submitting, the personal statement might show up in a different context. That's why we're including multiple personal statement essay examples in this guide. If you're applying with the Common Application, you'll be writing a personal statement essay as part of your application. The personal statement format of the Common App is a 500-650 word essay that answers one of 6 prompts–or it is an essay on "any topic of your choice." This personal statement format is relatively common. Indeed, many other personal statement examples will be of a similar length, answering similar prompts. Of course, different types of applications technically have different essay prompts. But, as you'll see in the personal statement examples, most of the prompts ask similar things of you as an applicant. In order to write a strong personal essay, you'll need to spend some time introspecting. In this guide, we'll go over personal statement essay examples from the Common App as well as personal statement essay examples of the Questbridge essay. When reading these personal statement examples, you might wonder: what's the difference between personal statement examples and Common App essay examples? A personal statement is a broader category of essay that does not have to be affiliated with the Common Application. As you'll see in the personal essay examples, a personal statement is just an essay that says something about you. The Common App essay is a specific essay that answers one of the Common App prompts. It is submitted to every college you apply to using the Common App. Since the Common App is so, well, common, it may be the only personal statement you have to write. However, there are other application portals, like the Coalition Application and Questbridge program. Some schools also have their own application portal, such as ApplyTexas or the UC application. Depending on each application platform, the personal statement formats will vary. Therefore, it's good to look at personal statement examples from different application types so you can get a feel for how the personal statement formats differ. But, you'll notice similarities that exist among the personal statement examples, no matter the application platform. As we continue this guide on personal statement examples, let's dive into some personal statement examples prompts. In personal statement examples prompts, you may notice some themes. In general, all personal statement examples will provide students with an opportunity to explain a significant aspect of their personality or upbringing. Let's look at some personal statement examples prompts, starting with one from the Common App: And here's one of the personal statement examples prompts from the UC application: Pretty similar, right? Both of these personal statement examples prompts ask you to think about an academic subject that you're interested in and how you've interacted with that subject. If you're someone who spends a lot of time participating in academic or research-based extracurriculars, these personal statement examples prompts might be good for you. Alternately, if all of your extracurriculars are NOT academic—sports, theater, artistic pursuits, a job—this could be a great opportunity for you to elaborate on whatever academic area you're passionate about. These personal statement examples prompts are similar. However, that doesn't mean that you can re-use different personal statements to answer them. For one, that UC prompt has a word limit of 350 words, whereas the Common App prompt is between 500-650 words. Here's another of the UC personal statement examples prompts that is more unique and specific to the UC application: Now let's look to this prompt from the Common App personal statement examples prompts which is pretty singular to the Common App: Both of these personal statement examples prompts encourage you to reflect on yourself and your life. However, they are very different questions that would result in different personal essay formats. Now, let's look more closely at the Common App essay prompts before we look at Common App personal statement examples. The Common App essay prompts are the most frequently used personal statement format. As such, many of our personal statement examples are answers to Common App questions. Though schools often have additional short supplemental essays, most accept the Common App personal statement. There are 7 Common App essay prompts and each should be answered in 500-650 words: According to Forbes, the most popular of the Common App essay prompts (at least in 2016) is the first one. This prompt inquires about an important aspect of a student's background, identity, interest, or talent. It is very open-ended. Likewise, you'll find a lot of personal statement examples that talk about an important aspect of a student's background. One of the least popular of the Common App essay prompts is the third, where you're asked to reflect on a belief that's been challenged. This prompt gives you the opportunity to talk about something that has caused you to change, which is a really great subject for an essay. This prompt gives students the opportunity to weave in a lot of strong essay writing tactics: anecdotes (the moment that caused your perspective to change), an easy beginning-middle-end structure, and a window into your beliefs and why you believe them. Plus, if you answer this one of the Common App essay prompts, you'll be among a minority of students doing so, which is always good when doing college applications! The fifth of the Common App essay prompts is quite similar to the third in that it wants you to think about something that caused you to change. In general, all of the Common App personal essay examples will be very open-ended and focused on telling a personal story. Self-reflection and personal growth will be a theme among the prompts. When writing the Common App personal essay, many people get bogged down in choosing which of the Common App essay prompts to write about. If you feel like you don't have any college essay ideas, try brainstorming potential answers for each question. Is there a topic that speaks to you, or one answer that came especially easy when you were brainstorming? No one prompt is better than another. Simply put, the best of your college essay ideas is the one you're passionate about writing and tells something about who you are as a person. There are lots of places where you can find personal essay examples of Common App essays that worked. There are guides that point out the best personal statement essay examples and why they worked, personal essay examples that feature a student's "voice and personality," and personal essay examples that got students into universities like Johns Hopkins and UConn. If you're looking for more college essay ideas and college essay tips, these personal statement sample essays are a great place to start. Next, let's look at the prompts for the Coalition Application personal essay examples. The Coalition Application essay prompts are similar to the Common App essay prompts. Therefore, the personal essay examples that answer those prompts will follow a similar personal statement format. Both types of essays are also 500-650 words. These are the Coalition Application prompts for this year: Seems pretty familiar, right? If you read Common App personal essay examples and Coalition App personal essay examples, you may not be able to tell the difference. Remember, when you're writing an essay, you want to make sure to answer the specific prompt. Don't submit something that doesn't answer the question! But, all of the personal essay prompts are intentionally open-ended so that you can speak to yourself and your experiences without too much constraint. If you read our personal essay examples, you may not be able to tell from the personal statement format whether they're from the Common App or the Coalition App. This is normal! If it fits—for example, if you answer the prompt about a challenge you faced for both the Common App and the Coalition App—you could even use the same essay, with a few tweaks, to apply with both applications. However, applying to college isn't the time to cut corners. Whatever college essay ideas you write about, make sure that you've put your heart into them. Next, let's look at a slightly different personal statement format for our personal essay examples: the UC personal insight questions. Unlike the previous two personal statement formats, the UC personal insight questions are shorter personal essay examples, and you answer more than one. The UC system does not take the Common App. So, you'll have to answer these prompts if you want to apply to any of the University of California schools. These are the UC personal insight questions: The UC personal statement format is different from the Common App and the Coalition App. Since these questions are only answered in 350 words, you'll need to be more narrow in the scope of your essay. Pick a specific anecdote or topic, and write concisely about it. For this personal statement format, you also get to answer four different questions. This means that each question can showcase a different part of who you are. This can relieve some pressure that students face. Instead of feeling like you have to encapsulate your most important values and stories in one long essay, you get four chances to talk about different parts of your life. We don't have any specific UC personal essay examples in this guide. But, we do have more resources specific to UC schools—read our "resources" section at the end of the article for more. The Questbridge personal essay is also a different personal statement format than the other personal essay examples. For one, it's 800 words instead of the Common and Coalition Apps' 500-650, and there's only one prompt. This prompt is open-ended. It allows you to talk about whatever aspects of your life that you feel are the most meaningful and relevant to who you are. Questbridge is also different from other applications because it's not just an application portal, it's a scholarship. The Questbridge College Match program matches low-income students with top colleges for a full ride scholarship. It's very competitive and as such you shouldn't shy away from telling meaningful, personal stories in your application. Think deeply: what has shaped you into the person you are today? Questbridge provides its own resources to help students with these essays. This worksheet for brainstorming helps you narrow down a topic and themes, and they also provide personal essay examples. Additionally, we've included Questbridge personal essay examples in this guide—keep reading to find out why they worked. So while reading great personal essay examples is important, you're probably wondering how to write a personal statement. The first step of how to write a personal statement is brainstorming. Think about parts of your life and identity that have influenced you. What is your favorite subject in school, and why? How do you feel about your family's religion or traditions? Have you ever had a job that taught you something—about budgeting, politics, growing up? Write about something you're passionate about as this will allow the admissions committee to get to know you better. The second step of how to write a personal statement is to free write. Don't edit and don't overthink. Just set a timer and try to answer a Common App prompt. Or simply write a story about your life that you care about. Any and all pre-writing is going to be helpful. The third step of how to write a personal statement is actually outlining your essay. What's the hook at the beginning that grabs the reader? What anecdotes or details will you include in the middle? What do you want the reader to know about you by the end? If you know where you want to end up, you'll have an easier time getting there. The fourth step of how to write a personal statement is to actually write! Again, don't worry about editing (or length) too much at this stage. Just work on getting an essay written. Most importantly, do this long before the application deadline. You'll want sufficient time for the next step of how to write a personal statement… Revise! Wait a week, and then read your essay again. Are any parts clunky? Is there anything that doesn't seem clear? Send your essay to a friend, family member, or college counselor for an outside look. We can guarantee that all of our personal essay examples underwent some revision. Remember, writing is rewriting. Let's look at another important aspect of how to write a personal statement: planning. One big step of planning your personal essay is reading personal essay examples! Before you start writing your personal essay, read personal essay examples. This will allow you to get a feel for the personal statement format and what makes these essays persuasive. You can also get a good sense of common themes of personal essays from personal essay examples. Other than reading personal essay examples, an important step of planning how to write a personal statement is introspection. As this Forbes writer put it, "Whatever you write, it's about you." Even if you're answering a short question about your intended major or favorite movie, those things still tell college admissions who you are. In a longer personal statement, you'll want to make sure to connect your experiences and anecdotes back to what they have taught you or how you've grown because of them. But make no mistake: rather than Googling "what is an example of a good personal statement," it's far better to read our already-vetted personal essay examples. When reading our personal essay examples, keep in mind the personal statement format. For longer essays, this format will be pretty similar each time. For shorter essays, you have a little bit more leeway because you have less space, but keep the format in mind. Open with a hook to draw in your reader. This could be an anecdote, quote, song lyric, or just a really engaging statement. The hook should hint to what the rest of the essay will be about. This should come at some point in your first paragraph. What is your essay about? You don't need to be super detailed, but you should give the reader an idea of what this personal essay will be about. Is it about what your extracurriculars taught you about community? Is it the moment you realized you didn't want to be a doctor like your mom? Or is it how your upbringing in a desert area influenced your desire to work in sustainability? Whatever your main claim is, state it from the beginning. The next 2-3 paragraphs are the body of your essay. In the body, work on showing, not telling. For example, don't just say, "Now, sustainability was the most important thing in my life." Instead, "Now, instead of driving to school every day, I rode my bike, or took a bus. And every pizza box was painstakingly scraped and placed in the recycling bin." A good personal essay format is often chronological: it provides a clear way to structure your work that moves from beginning to end. If the hook is one influential conversation with your teacher that changed what you believed, the next two paragraphs could describe what happened next with your thoughts. Most importantly, describe some kind of change or progression. Your conclusion should restate the main thesis or topic of your essay and look towards the future. What did what you talked about in your essay teach you? How will it affect you as a soon-to-be college student? The personal statement format will be truncated with shorter essays, like the UC personal essay examples. Worry less about including whole anecdotes and more about using vivid descriptions for the points you want to get across. You should still try to hook your reader at the beginning, but do so with one line rather than a whole story. Now that we've gone over the personal statement format, let's take a closer look at how you start a personal statement before we dive into our personal essay examples. As we've mentioned, for the standard personal statement format, you want to start with a hook. A hook can be many different things. It can just be an engaging phrase, something that makes the reader want to keep reading, such as the following: "I never knew that last Thanksgiving would be the last time I saw my childhood home." "After 10 years of animosity, I can finally say that I understand my mother." "The most beautiful thing I've ever seen was on an old chalkboard in a dingy 10th grade classroom." A hook can also be an anecdote. Put the reader right in the middle of a scene, and tell the story from there. Remember, this part of the personal statement format is one of the most important. If you start and end your essay in a strong and memorable way, that's what your reader will take with them. Keep this in mind as you're reading the personal essay examples. All of these personal essay examples have compelling hooks—take note of each one and think about what makes it successful. The first of our personal statement examples for college is about how the student's upbringing influenced their desire to study politics and human rights. The student showcases their outstanding academic work and demonstrates the values that matter to them. Hundreds of thousands were fleeing the country, its endless violence, and its senseless injustices. I was born in the midst of a war-torn Colombia in 1993. My mother and I were caught up in this cascade of refugee emigrants. In this way, failed political and legal human rights systems served as a foundation for my upbringing — an upbringing that has shaped my motivations, academic pursuits, and aspirations for a future in public service. I had experienced many obstacles from the outset, but none as impactful as growing up as an undocumented refugee in Florida, U.S. Having left both family and nation behind, from an early age, I witnessed the sufferings that come as a result of failed human rights protection systems. These pains began to catalyze an eager desire within me to prepare myself to be able to protect the most vulnerable and underrepresented. In the U.S., my mother always instilled in me the belief that I could do anything if I worked hard enough. She would always tell me, "todo es possible, si te esfuerzas." Her words motivated me to keep overcoming and nourished within me a zeal for learning. I applied her words in my academics and on the football field, and I began to see the fruits of that labor. During those moments I felt grateful for how life was molding me, but I felt an even stronger gratitude for my Christian upbringing. It was this spirituality, imparted unto me by my mother, that grounded me in what I consider to be the most important quality of all: Integrity. With time, I understood the importance of this project. My aim for social service and social justice, if not intertwined with integrity, would be, in my opinion, for naught. My life experiences brought about my interest in political theory. Notably, in analyzing how the philosophical interwove into the pragmatic fabric of the defenseless, using the case of the vulnerable populations that I belonged to as a lens. Research that, due to my desire to have my IB Independent Essay embody that of undergraduate-level work, I had begun even before arriving on campus. For two years, I dedicated a significant amount of time to construct ideological models that would allow for political institutions to practice their vocation with integrity and virtue, devoid of corruption. The intent of working on what my advisor called "one of the thorniest dilemmas in political theory and the history of political thought," was no accident. I knew that the work was difficult. Yet, I have realized that nothing worth its merit is ever easy. In culminating my essay, I was elated by its success. My approach and philosophy on politics, law, human rights, and what I wish to continue studying, reflects this very work. It is about helping others, the right way. Because, ultimately, I believe that sustainable political and legal practices arise from axiomatic virtue in action. What I wish to be, and whom I want to protect and serve, has everything to do with what my family and I had lacked. Someone that would have stood up for us. As a victim, refugee, and survivor, my tribulations are my sense of purpose. They fuel me to stand up for others. Though I still believe that I can do all things, I also understand my limits and that, as much as I desire to, I cannot change the whole world. Notwithstanding, I feel an obligation to make the most significant difference that I can for those in need. I believe that in acquiring the knowledge that a bachelor's degree in politics can offer, I will be better equipped to address the social injustices prevalent around the world and do my part to construct, alongside my colleagues, a better tomorrow. Next in our personal statement examples for college is an essay about a belief that a student is questioning: Catholicism. The student has to wrestle with their family's staunch belief to figure out what they truly care about, and then muster the courage to tell their family. This essay follows this student's struggle, and reflects on the challenge of having an unorthodox belief. My journey of questioning the Catholic beliefs that my family members hold close to their hearts has been incredibly intimate and thought-provoking. For many years, I felt as if I had to manifest into the religious person I was not, merely to keep my parents content, and this demoralized me for a large portion of my life. Having to hear Bible verses in a church I was forced to sit in every Sunday and trying to find the validity in these stories is what my time in mass truly consisted of. Why can't I bring myself to believe that these stories are true, when everyone sitting here is able to? Growing up in a hispanic household in which the statement "Gracias a Dios que…" (translation: "Thank God that…") is expressed everyday, even in the most simplest occurrences, caused me to continue contemplating the veracity of these beliefs as I matured. Thoughts would course through my mind about the reasons why we were thanking God when he did not hand anything to us himself and my parents were working hard for everything that we had. Even when it came to our health, this statement would be reiterated. Trips to medical offices and recovering from illnesses were filled with this statement, and it aggravated me to witness this spiritual being getting the credit for a doctor's knowledge and actions. Even more questions that I wouldn't dare to ask kept consuming my thoughts, the biggest one being, "Am I wrong for believing that my family should not be thanking God?" One of the most significant aspects of my journey is the day I discovered that my grandfather is also an atheist, as it brought relief upon seeing that I was not alone in doubting the beliefs that my family members hold. However, once the conversation turned to speak about how wrong he was, this feeling of relief quickly brought out my underlying fear that my parents would view me negatively if they knew that I was not the dutiful and religious daughter they believed I was. I also didn't remember the last time I had spoken to my grandfather, and a feeling of solitude washed over me once again. The denouement of my journey arrived when I determined that I did not believe in a god and was no longer afraid of not being accepted by my parents for this. I built the courage to inform them that I do not share the beliefs they hold dear to their hearts. When I realized that I did not have to believe in a god in order to be a good person, my fear of not being accepted went away, as I began to accept myself. The most ironic aspect of this journey is the amount of times my family has told me that I am wrong for being an atheist, when I have never told them that they are wrong for being Catholics. I may not partake in their beliefs, but I will always respect the fact that they have them. This journey has been crucial to my personal growth and has shaped me into a very accepting person. One of the biggest factors that has diverted me from having a desire to be part of a religious community is how exclusive they tend to be. It is not only the conceptual aspect of religion that I do not believe in, but also the way many humans have interpreted it and used it to justify discriminatory acts throughout history. Everyone in this world should be accepted for who they are, as long as they do not harm others. Being an atheist and dealing with the backlash of my family telling me that I am wrong has only led me to be even more passionate about the things I stand for. I implore that no one should put others down for being their true selves. The last of our personal statement examples for college is a Questbridge essay. As mentioned above, the Questbridge essay is for a full-ride scholarship, and so this personal statement format has only one prompt and an 800-word limit. This essay uses vivid description and metaphor to show how something that seems very casual—Costco pizza night—came to represent the sacrifices the student's parents made to support their family. Questbridge essays often discuss challenges and adversity. Read this last essay of our personal statement examples for college for an example of what makes a great college essay. I love Costco pizza. While I now know that this cheesy, greasy gift from God isn't good for my arteries, that's not why I feel so strongly about a Costco staple. My fondness stems from the lessons learned in between bites of tangy tomato sauce. Sprinting through the towers of bulk foods and between sample carts of Kirkland Signature pizza rolls, Costco was my Garden of Eden. While my parents stocked up on toilet paper and excessive amounts of Madeline Petites, my brother and I raced to the food court and secured our rightful spot in line among the sea of families. The enormous signs towered over us as we scanned the menu for our manna: a ten dollar, eighteen-inch pizza. We made our pilgrimage to Costco every Sunday as a family, and it was the only day we were all together. Gathered around the classic red table, we sat on the benches and feasted as if it were the Last Supper. In my eight-year-old eyes, it felt like it was. The recession of 2008 crashed down on us. Papi spent every waking moment in Atlanta, working as a sous chef at the Intercontinental Hotel in Buckhead. Mami worked a regular nine to five Monday through Friday, but with school over at three pm, she was rarely home by then. Every weekday after school was the same routine. I wrestled with the front door, attempting to pry it open as my little brother sat on the ground, entranced by the wiggling worms. Together, we tackled our work, keeping each other company in the otherwise empty house. Friday came, and so did excitement at seeing my parents for more than eight hours. Romeo Santos crooned as my mother cleaned on Saturday mornings, and cartoons blared from the television. I was one day closer to entering the promised land: Costco. Before she even let go, I flung myself from my mother's arms and onto the grey linoleum floors. My father slid ten dollars into my hand and winked at me, already aware of my intentions. I raced to the endless line while my brother secured our side table. Pressed up against the smudged glass, we watched, transfixed as gloved hands twirled the dough. My family had front row seats to the greatest show every Sunday. Surrounding the 18-inch masterpiece, we dug in immediately, burning our tongues on the scorching cheese. We laughed about the 'locos' that visited Mami's job, and Papi recounted stories about famous people who dined at the hotel. Being able to finally spend time with my entire family brought me the greatest joy. Yet, while these memories are plentiful and endearing, they didn't shape me into who I am today. It was the difficult conversations. It was over pizza that my father told us he had gotten a second job at Belk because one wasn't enough. As tomato sauce rolled down my chin, my parents spoke in hushed voices about 'mortgage' and 'loans': words I couldn't even begin to comprehend. Yet, it was at those glossy, red tables where my parents reminded me of their endless love and sacrifice. My parents gave up their dream home and countless hours of sleep so that I could attend a reputable high school. My home was empty after school because they worked overtime. As we chewed the last bites and headed out the door, my father would always tell me, "Mija, I don't want you to be like me, working like a donkey for nothing. I hope you aren't embarrassed of me." It was then that, I wish I had the courage to tell him that he made me proud. I wish I had the courage now to thank them for everything. Pizza Sundays at Costco were more than a simple meal. They created the person I am today. I learned about the sacrifices my parents made, and the obstacles they faced that I couldn't even begin to wrap my mind around. They were like the crust, sturdy and unfailing: the foundation and support system that I still rely on. Like the cheese, they were flexible and durable; they never collapsed under pressure and kept us together. They were essential like sauce is to a pizza; without them, there would be no family. Just like every pie, they too had been tossed around and molded, beaten but not destroyed. I love my parents. While they raised me and gave me weekly pizza dinners, that's not why I feel so strongly about who they are. It's the lessons they taught me that propel me to serve my community and lift others up. They embody true passion, sacrifice, and love and influence me to strive for greatness in my academic endeavors and relationships. They are the ultimate example to me. What makes a great college essay? As you probably noticed in those personal statement examples, self-reflection is vital when it comes to writing a standout personal essay. Most importantly, be yourself! Reading personal statement sample essays for college is important to getting started, however, it's not everything. You'll need to consider your unique experiences, perspectives, and future goals in order to write your most meaningful personal essay. Write about a subject you are genuinely passionate about. The personal statement format we provided is just a guideline—there is no perfect personal statement format that will always work. However, don't do anything too crazy—like rhyming the whole time or submitting 100 words for a 500 word essay. But, remember that we learn the rules of the personal statement format so that we can break them. As long as the essay is grammatically correct, interesting, and true to who you are, you can get creative. Look for creative personal statement sample essays for inspiration. Don't just make statements—explain why those statements matter. You can see this in all of the personal essay examples we shared. If something was meaningful to you, explain why. If you want to study a specific subject, explain why. When in doubt, answer why. You can see this demonstrated in the personal statement sample essays above: all of these personal essay examples explain why a student has a specific value or career goal. Make sure your spelling and grammar are perfect. Nothing kills an essay faster than a typo, and with all of the various spell-check tools available today, there is no excuse. To catch any typos or confusing phrases, read your essay out loud. Anything you stumble on or can't say in one breath is probably worth revisiting. Look to the personal statement sample essays for guidance. There are never too many college essay tips to make applying to college less overwhelming. So, to write an essay that impresses college admissions, in addition to reading college essays that worked and strong examples of college essays, here are some things that you can do: Check if the schools you're applying to have a different personal statement format, or look for any other personal statement requirements besides the Common App. Start working in advance—reading guides like this one on personal statement sample essays is a great start. But, reading other materials on college essay tips and applying to college will help you feel more confident when the college admissions process actually begins. Don't just stop at these personal statement sample essays—read more examples of college essays that aren't necessarily personal statement sample essays. Learning how to write a great supplemental essay, an essay focused on career or academics, or a personal statement sample essay in the UK are all valuable lessons. These New York Times-recognized personal statement sample essays about money and class are also exceptional—keep reading personal statement sample essays to help you craft your own! We've got a whole tab on different types of essay guides and Common App essay prompts, like the transfer essay. For more college essay ideas and college essay tips, check out those resources. And, speaking of CollegeAdvisor resources and college essay tips… Here are more resources from CollegeAdvisor on how to ace your essays when applying to college: Check out this webinar on how to write about your extracurriculars in your college essays. It can be hard to write about extracurriculars without falling into cliches or overdone sports metaphors—watch this webinar to learn more! This webinar explains how to translate your personal interests into a future major. Thinking about how to connect your interests to your future major is very helpful for essay writing, especially for the many "why major" supplemental essays you may have to write! Looking at college-specific personal statement sample essays and supplemental essays can be very helpful—especially with an analysis of why they worked. UChicago's essays are notorious for being unique and outlandish—read some of these personal statement sample essays to spark your creativity! We hope that after reading this guide on personal essay examples you feel more prepared to write great college essays. Our personal statement examples for college span many different topics and represent great storytelling across the board. This guide on personal statement examples showcased college essays that worked, and answered questions like, "what is a personal statement?" "what are the differences between personal statements on different application platforms?" and "how do I structure my personal statement?" By reading examples of college essays that worked, we hope that you have a better understanding of the personal statement format, as well as how to impress college admissions with stellar storytelling, structure, and grammar. Remember: the biggest thing that college admissions officers are looking for is to learn more about you. So, consider what makes you unique, and start writing! This article about personal essay examples was written by advisor, Rachel Kahn. Looking for more admissions support? Click here to schedule a free meeting with one of our Admissions Specialists. During your meeting, our team will discuss your profile and help you find targeted ways to increase your admissions odds at top schools. We'll also answer any questions and discuss how CollegeAdvisor.com can support you in the college application process. What's that old saying? "The best way to learn is by doing." Well, we believe that, in personal statements and in life, cliches like this should be avoided. That's why we recommend reading some example essays before you start writing your own. Now, before we get into our examples, we should quickly talk about what admissions officers look for in personal statements in the first place. What does an admissions officer look for in a personal statement? Before we get to the essays, let's briefly walk through what goes through an admissions officer's head when they open an application. Admissions officers (AOs) read hundreds to thousands of applications in a single year. Different institutions require admissions officers to use different criteria when evaluating applications, so the specifics will vary by school. Your entire application should cohere to form a seamless narrative. You'll be crafting that narrative across the following categories: Transcripts and course rigor: AOs look at the classes you've taken to assess how much you've challenged yourself based on the classes your school offers. They're also looking at how well you've done in these classes each term. Extracurricular activities: When reading through your activities list, AOs look at the activities you've done, how many years you've participated in them, and how many hours a week you devote to them. They're assessing your activities for the levels of magnitude, impact, and reach that they demonstrate. (Want to know more about these terms? Check out our extracurricular impact post.) Background information: This background information briefly tells admissions officers about demographic and family information, your school context, and any honors or awards you've received. Letters of recommendation: Letters of recommendation give AOs insight into who you are in the classroom. Essays: And, finally, the essays. Whether you're writing a personal statement or a supplemental essay, essays are the main place AOs get to hear your voice and learn more about you. Your personal statement in particular is the place where you get to lay out your overall application narrative and say something meaningful about your personal strengths. So, with all that in mind, what does an admissions officer actually look for when reading your personal statement? A few traits tend to surface across the best personal statements, no matter the topic or format. There are four primary areas you should focus on as you craft your personal statement. Strengths: AOs want to know about your strengths. That doesn't mean bragging about your accomplishments, but it does mean writing about a topic that lets you showcase something positive about yourself. Personal meaning: Personal statements shouldn't be fluff. They shouldn't be history essays. They should be personal essays that ooze meaning. The topic you choose should show something significant about yourself that the admissions officers won't get from any other part of your application. Authenticity and vulnerability: These characteristics can be the most difficult to achieve. Being "vulnerable" doesn't mean airing all your dirty laundry. It means revealing something authentic and meaningful about who you are. To be vulnerable means to go beyond the surface level to put yourself out there, even to admissions officers who you've never met. Clear organization and writing: And lastly, admissions officers also want your essay to be organized clearly so it's easy to follow along. Remember that admissions officers are reading lots of applications, even in one sitting. So you want to make your reader's job as easy as possible. Thoughtful and skillful writing can also help take your personal statement to the next level. If you want to know more about how to incorporate these traits into your own essay, we have a whole guide about how to write the perfect personal statement. But for now, let's get into the examples. We've broken up the example personal statements into three categories: best personal statement examples, good personal statement examples, and "bad" personal statement examples. These categories show you that there is a spectrum of what personal statements can look like. The best examples are the gold standard. They meet or exceed all four of the main criteria admissions officers are looking for. The good examples are just that: good. They're solid examples that may be lacking in a specific area but are still effective personal statements. The "bad" examples are those that don't yet stack up to the expectations of a personal statement. They're not objectively bad, but they need some specific improvements to align with what admissions officers are looking for. Here we go! The Best Personal Statement Examples Writing an exceptional personal statement takes a lot of time and effort. Even the best writers can find the genre challenging. But when you strike the perfect chord and get it right, it's almost like magic. Your essay jumps off the page and captures an admissions officer's attention. They feel like you're right there with them, telling them everything they need to know to vote "yes" on your admission. The following essays are some of our favorites. They cover a range of topics, styles, and student backgrounds. But they all tell meaningful stories about the writers' lives. They are well-organized, use vivid language, and speak to the writers' strengths. For each essay, our team of former admissions officers have offered comments about what makes the essay exceptional. Take a look through the annotations and feedback to see what lessons you can apply to your own personal statement. Personal Statement Example #1: Reinvention For our first example, which we've titled "Reinvention," we're going to watch Alex break the essay down paragraph by paragraph. This one's really good. Let's take a look. As Alex explains, this essay takes a couple of (very beautiful!) paragraphs to get to its central message: reinvention. Once we reach that turning point, the writer seamlessly introduces us to their engineering interests, then returns again to their mother's influence. The metaphor of "watermelon rinds" ties everything together. The writer comes across as a clever, thoughtful person—one we would surely want on our campus. Grade: A+! (Want to see more video examples and get personalized application and essay help? Let's work together.) Personal Statement Example #2: Thankful My family has always been broke. Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings, always the same drill: the kids (my brothers and me) would be loaded in the car with my parents and off we'd all go to the food pantry. New clothes were few and far between, and going on vacation was something that we could only dream of. Despite our financial struggles, one year, my parents decided to surprise us with a trip to Disney Land. It was a complete shock to me and my siblings. We were over the moon. In fact, the screams of excitement that emanated from my younger brother's mouth still ring in my ears. But as the trip drew close, my excitement tempered and I began to worry. Being poor when you're young doesn't just affect you materially. It also affects how you see the world and loads you up with a whole range of anxieties that, in an ideal world, no child should have to face. How were my parents going to afford this, I wondered? Would an expense like this push us over the brink?((The beginning of this essay, and especially this sentence, show the writer's empathy. They are not selfish; they understand their broader family context and take that into consideration.)) I didn't want to ruin the surprise by asking, but I couldn't shake the feeling of dread building inside of me. The day of our trip arrived and we set off for the airport. In the car, my dad made an off-the-cuff comment about a new video game that he'd wanted to play but didn't buy, and everything clicked—my parents had made the trip possible by saving for months, cutting back on expenses and sacrificing their own comforts to make the trip happen. As we boarded the plane, I was filled with a mix of emotions. I was grateful beyond words for my parents' sacrifice, but I was also overwhelmed by the guilt of knowing that they had given up so much for us. I didn't know how to express my gratitude; when we deplaned in LAX, I gave my mom and dad a rib-crushing hug. The trip itself was everything that I had dreamed of and more. We spent four magical days at Disney Land((Nice use of vivid details here. The reader can picture the sights and smells of Disney—and the ensuing hunger when passing a churro stand.)), speed running the roller coasters and campy boat rides from the 70s. Sure, we packed our own food and walked right by the churro stands with a hungry look in our eyes. But I will never forget the feeling of unmitigated joy that my family shared on that trip, the smiles that painted my parents' faces. But the trip itself was nothing compared to the gratitude I felt for my parents((Here, the writer transitions to reintroducing the theme of gratitude.)). They had given us the gift of a lifetime, and I knew that I would never be able to repay them for their sacrifice. In the years since that trip, I have carried that feeling of gratitude with me. It has motivated me to work hard and to always strive to be the best person that I can be. I want to make my parents proud and to show them that their sacrifice was worth it((Finally, the writer sums things up with an eye to the future. It's helpful for an admission officer to picture what the essay's lessons might mean for the student as a future community member.)). I will never be able to fully express my gratitude for what my parents did for us, but I will always remember their selflessness and their willingness to put their own needs aside for the sake of our happiness. It was a truly surprising and incredible act of love, and one that I will always be thankful for. AO Notes on Thankful Grade: A This essay accomplishes a few things even though it essentially tells one story and offers a quick reflection. It gives some important context regarding the challenges of being from a lower-income family. It does that in a way that is authentic, rather than problem-focused. It also shows that the writer is empathetic, family-oriented, and reflective. Why this essay stands out: Vulnerability: This essay is upfront about a challenging topic: financial insecurity. While you don't have to tell your most difficult challenge in an essay, this writer chose to write about a circumstance that gives additional context that may be helpful as admissions considers their application. Personal: The writer gets into some family dynamics and paints a picture of how their family treats and takes care of each other. Values: We clearly see some values the writer has and that they don't take their parents' sacrifices for granted. As an admission officer, I can picture this student using their education to give back—to their family or to others. Personal Statement Example #3: Pickleball I've always been one to have a good attitude no matter the circumstances. Except when it comes to exercise. From dodgeball in PE class to family Turkey Trots, I'm always the first one out and the last one across the finish line. These realities aren't from a lack of skill—I'm actually quite coordinated and fast. They are from a lack of effort((This is a quick hit of… either humor or vulnerability. I chuckled at the blunt honesty, and am intrigued to learn more.)). Despite my best intentions, I can never get myself to care about sports or competitions. So when my dad first asked me to be his pickleball partner last summer, I did nothing but laugh. But soon, I realized that he was serious. My dad started playing pickleball two years ago as a fun way to exercise. He'd become a star in our city's recreation league, and I always enjoyed cheering him on from the sidelines. When his doubles partner got relocated for work, my dad decided that the disruption was a good opportunity for us bond through pickleball. Even though I was mortified by the thought of running back and forth to hit a bouncing ball, I reluctantly agreed. The next Saturday morning, we went to the court for our first practice. I was wearing sweatpants, an old sweatshirt, and a grimace. My dad showed me how to hold the paddle, serve, and return the ball to our opponents. He told me about staying out of the kitchen—an endearing pickleball term that references the "kitchen," or the middle part of the court—trying to make me laugh. Instead, I sighed impatiently and walked to my end of the court, ready to get it over with. My dad remained patient in spite of my bad attitude. He gently served me the ball, and I gave a lackluster attempt to return it. The ball bounced into the net. I hadn't even made it to his side of the court. Trying his best to encourage me, my dad gave me the ball so I could serve it to him instead. I tossed the ball up and hit it underhand toward my dad. It hit the net again. I tried again and again, each attempt with less care than the last. I grew frustrated and threw my paddle down in anger((Okay, this paragraph gives a good dose of openness to the emotions of the writer. They've served up an opportunity to learn a lesson soon…)). After seeing my mini-meltdown, my dad crossed the kitchen to talk to me. During our conversation, I began to ask myself why I got so frustrated when I wasn't trying very hard in the first place. I thought pickleball was a miserable sport, but I realized that it wasn't pickleball that I cared about. I cared about my dad. I wanted to make him proud((Ah, and there it is! A realization. As the admission officer I'm thinking, "Go on…")). Playing pickleball with him was the least I could do to thank him for everything he'd done for me. I dusted off my bad attitude alongside my paddle, and I got up to try another serve. That serve hit the net again. But more determined now, I kept trying until my serves went over the net and through my dad's weak side. I couldn't believe it. My attitude adjustment helped me see the game for what it was: a game. It wasn't supposed to be agonizing or cruel. It was supposed to be fun. I learned that my attitude towards sports was unacceptable. This experience taught me that it's okay to have preferences about what you enjoy, but it's important to always maintain a positive attitude((And the lesson learned!)). You may just enjoy it after all. Now my dad and I are both stars in our recreation league. Soon, we will make our way to our league's semi-finals. We've worked our way through the bracket and are close to the championship. What I appreciate more about this experience, however, is how close it's brought my dad and I together. His patience, positivity, and persistence have and will always inspire me. I want to be more like him every day, especially on the pickleball court. AO Notes on Pickleball Grade: A This is a strong "attitude adjustment" essay, a bit of a remix of a challenge essay. The challenge, in this case, was a fixed mindset about sports that needed to be adjusted. The writer takes us on a witty journey through their own attitude towards organized athletic activities and their father. Why this essay stands out: Self-aware: Similar to the vulnerability of other essays, this writer is willing to criticize themselves by recognizing that they need an attitude adjustment. Even before they changed their attitude, we get the sense that they are at least aware of their own lack of effort. Strong conclusion: We see a nice lesson at the end that relates both to having an open mind and caring for others. They even make a point about simply enjoying things because they are fun. Life lesson: Beyond the stated lesson, as an admission officer with a few more years on this Earth than the writer, I can tell this lesson will apply beyond sports. In fact, I can easily picture this student trying a new class, club, or group of friends in college because they are now more open to novel experiences. Personal Statement Example #4: The Bird Watcher I'm an avid walker and bird watcher((Okay, the writer gets right into it! I think this simple introduction of the topic works well because they are writing about a less common hobby among teenagers. If they had said "I am an avid baseball player", I would have been less eager to learn more.)). Growing up, I'd clear my head by walking along the trail in the woods behind my house. By the time I was immersed in the chaos of high school, these walks became an afternoon routine. Now, every day at three o'clock, I don my jacket and hiking shoes and set off. As I walk, I note the flora and fauna around me. The wind whispering through the trees, the quiet rustling of a chipmunk underfoot, and the high-pitched call of robins perched atop branches, all of it brings me back to life after a difficult day. And recently, the days have been more difficult than not. My grandparents

people around them. And I especially like how the writer chose to end on a note of gratitude—always a good value to have in a personal statement. Personal Statement Example #7: Rosie's While most people find their lowest point at rock bottom, I found mine in an Amerikooler DW081677F-8((We're definitely off to an odd start. I'm curious where this is headed!)). With drops rolling down my back and my cheeks, I snuck into the walk-in freezer for a moment of chill. At that point, I had worked at Rosie's for nearly a year. The job was a good one: it fit with my school schedule, paid well, and introduced me to close friends. But as a workplace, Rosie's was pure chaos. The original owners passed on a host of problems the new owners were working hard to fix. But the problems ran deep. From an inefficient kitchen organization to a malfunctioning scheduling software, we never knew what to do or when. The day I found myself in the Amerikooler was the day everything caught up with us((This is a good transitional phrase that helps readers navigate this fairly complex narrative.)). An error in our scheduling software led to us operating with only 30% of our typical team. As the only waitress on duty, I ran between the kitchen and the guests, stopping mid-delivery to put new vegetables in the steamers. The kitchen staff were barely getting through each dish before customers lost patience. Then, in all the commotion, I dropped a plate of macaroni and cheese all over a customer. I apologized over and over again. I was embarrassed and ashamed. I couldn't believe what I had done. I always tried to be one step ahead to give my customers the best service, so my mistake felt like an utter failure. After helping them clean up, I ran immediately to the freezer. I realized that something had to change. In the Amerikooler, a pea and corn mix cool on my back, I considered my options. The easiest option was to quit. I could find another job, one that didn't cause me so much stress. But quitting wouldn't just mean giving up. It would mean accepting my failure. It would also mean abandoning the coworkers I had grown close to. Leaving them would only burden them more. While I knew it wasn't my job to fix the restaurant, I knew that leaving wasn't the answer either. Instead, I decided to focus on solutions((I like the focus on solutions and action steps here!)). I stood up from the cold, dirty freezer floor, dusted off my work pants, washed my hands, and got back to work. Despite being the newest and youngest member of the Rosie's staff, I recognized that I brought a new perspective to the workplace. Having spent the previous three summers scheduling volunteers for my local food drive, I used my organizing experience to devise a new scheduling system, one that didn't rely on our outdated technology. I brought up the system at our weekly meeting, and after initial pushback, everyone agreed to give it a try. Three months later, my system keeps everyone happy and our kitchen and floor staffed. But it wasn't just the staffing problem that was the issue. Our workflows were inefficient, and we didn't know how to communicate or collaborate effectively. I know that identifying an issue is always the first step to a solution, so I raised the question at our most recent staff meeting. Having earned my coworkers' and bosses' trust((And here we see some good growth and leadership.)), I led us in outlining a few new processes to streamline our productivity. In stark contrast to the failure I felt after spilling the macaroni and cheese, developing a new workflow with my coworkers made me proud. I hadn't given in to the chaos, but I had worked thoughtfully and collaboratively to create new solutions. I'm sure that won't be my last time working in a disorganized environment or spilling macaroni and cheese. But I know that I'll be ready to address whatever comes my way. AO Notes on Rosie's Grade: A If you've ever worked in a food establishment, then something in this essay will probably resonate with you. But I appreciate how the writer doesn't get pulled into the negativity they experience. Instead, they focused their efforts (and their essay) on how they could make things better for everyone. That's the kind of student admissions officers want to see on their campuses. Why this essay stands out: Organization: The writer has to narrate and backtrack a bit at the beginning of the essay to make the introduction work. But it's not confusing for a reader because they have very solid transitions. I also like how the action steps and reflection are organized in the narrative. Positive outlook: As an admissions officer, I would admire this student for their problem-solving skills. Working in that environment was surely tough, but they didn't give up. They got to work and helped everyone out in the process. Humor: From the introduction to the conclusion, the writer incorporates subtle humor throughout. Because of it, we actually feel like we know the writer by the conclusion. Too much humor can overwhelm a personal essay, but just enough can help readers see who the writer really is. Personal Statement Example #8: Gone Fishing I pulled the line with my left hand and snapped the rod back with my right. The line split through the air above me like a knife through cake. I rigidly waved my right arm up and down to dry off my fly, which had started sinking from the weight of the water. Ready to cast, I loosened the grip on my left hand to release a few more feet of line, pulled my right arm back in a grandiose motion, and hammered it back down. I expected my line to fly out in front of me, gracefully floating back onto the surface of the water. Instead, I was met with a startling resistance. My fly had lodged itself into the bush behind me((This opening paragraph has great vivid description. Here, we end on a moment of suspense that has left me intrigued about what will happen next.)). Annoyed, I waded through the tall, thick grass, rod under my arm and mosquitoes buzzing in my ears. This was the reality of fly fishing. In my short time as a fisherman, I'd caught far more trees, bushes, and riverweed than I had fish. What seems so elegant in movies like A River Runs Through It is actually a grueling process of trial and error. I took up flyfishing a year ago to conquer my fear of the outdoors((Ah ha—we learn that this essay isn't really about fly fishing. It's about conquering a fear. And with that, we see that the stakes are high.)). I could have (and probably should have) chosen a more mild activity like hiking or kayaking, but I've always been one to take on a challenge. I had been afraid of the outdoors since childhood. Coming from a family that prefers libraries to parks and bed and breakfasts to tents, I never learned how to appreciate nature. I limited my time outside as much as I could. I feared the bugs, the sun, and the unknown. I decided to try flyfishing when I realized I didn't want to be controlled by my fear any longer((As an AO, I would applaud this student's bravery.)). All the birthday parties I'd turned down, the memories that were made without me, I had missed out on so much. Being outside was an integral part of the human experience—or, at least, that's what I'd been told. Without being willing to enjoy nature, I was missing out on what it meant to be myself. Soon after this realization, I found an old rod in my grandpa's garage and took it as a sign from the universe. On my first time out, my Honda Civic lurched over a ditch on the gravel road Google Maps had directed me to. I'd spent hours watching YouTube videos of proper technique. Stepping out of my car, I felt my skin crack under the dry heat, and I wanted to leave. But I continued on, walking through branches and over logs to the riverbank. I was doing it(More vivid detail that really gives us a sense of the writer's discomfort—yet they're persisting.)). I pushed myself to continue, no matter how uncomfortable I got. I went back, Saturday after Saturday, each time noticing improvements in my abilities. Along the way, I learned to push myself to do things that make me uncomfortable. I saw myself in a new light. I wasn't Charlie, afraid of the outdoors. I was Charlie, fisherman. The first time I caught a fish, I could hardly believe it. Thinking I had caught another piece of riverweed, I tugged on my line and rolled my eyes. But suddenly, it started tugging back. It was a sensation I'd never experienced before, one of haste, pride, and panic. I instantly collected myself, bracing against the bank as I secured the line with my finger and slowly pulled the fish ashore. Delicately removing my hook from its mouth, I admired its beauty. Whereas I had once feared creatures like this trout, I now respected it. Its holographic scales glistened in the sunlight. I thanked it for helping me grow, and I placed it back in the water. It swam away. I wiped the slime off my hands and picked up my rod, left hand tugging at the line, right hand snapping back again((This conclusion is quite long, but I really like this poetic ending. It shows so much growth, and there's a subtle nod to the fact that the writer is continuing to fish.)). AO Notes on Gone Fishing Grade: A From all this imagery, I really felt like I was fishing alongside them. What's better, I feel like I really get where this student is coming from because of their vulnerability. They show immense growth and open-mindedness, which is exactly what admissions officers are looking for. Why this essay stands out: Imagery: This writer definitely likes creative writing. From the introduction, we can envision ourselves going on this journey with the writer. There is some excellent "show, don't tell" here. Deep personal meaning: Biggest fears are hard to overcome, especially with such a good attitude. It's clear that this topic is a meaningful one to the writer. Even the act of fly fishing, which they didn't seem to like much at first, becomes a meaningful act. Narrative arc: We have a classic "going on a journey" essay, where the writer transforms on a journey from point A (being afraid of the outdoors) to point B (catching a fish). The writer's implementation of this structure is excellent, which makes the essay easy to follow. Good Personal Statement Examples Even if your essay isn't worthy of The New Yorker, you can still make your mark on admissions officers. Writing an essay that fulfills all the goals of a personal statement, whether or not it meets every single criterion an admissions officer is looking for, can still get you into a great college. Most personal statements are good personal statements, so don't worry if you're feeling overwhelmed by the amazing essay examples you see online. The key to writing a good personal statement is writing your personal statement. Focus on finding a topic that lets you communicate your own meaning and voice, and you'll be set. The following examples are awesome personal statements. There may be a little room for improvement in places, but the essays do exactly what they need to do. And they say a lot about their writers. Let's see what the writers and admissions officers have to say. Personal Statement Example #9: Beekeeper's Club As I lift the heavy lid of the hive, the hum of thousands of bees fills my ears. I carefully smoke the entrance to calm the bees, and I begin to inspect the frames. The bees are busy at work, collecting nectar and pollen, and tending to their young. I am in awe of their organization. I never would have thought that I, a high school student, would become a beekeeper((An interesting hobby for a high school student! I'm intrigued to see where this is going.)). But now it's something I can't imagine my life without. It all started when I found a beekeeping suit at a garage sale two summers ago. At a mere five dollars, it was yellowing and musty, but it appeared to be fully intact and without any holes. I've lived many lives as a hobbyist, always willing to try new things. I've been a sailor, a gardener, a basketball player, a harpist, a rock climber, and more. The problem is that I can never manage to see these hobbies through((I see. Here we get a sense of what's at stake in this new venture. The problem is that writer can't seem to hold down a hobby. Will beekeeping solve that problem? Let's find out.)). As a perpetual novice, I always lose interest or become overwhelmed by all the information. But that's never stopped me from taking up a new hobby, so I brought the beekeeping suit to the make-shift register and handed the seller a five-dollar bill. To embark on my new hobby, I first went to the library and read everything I could find about beekeeping. Research is always my first step when starting something new. I like to know what I'm in for. As I read, I became fascinated by the fact that such small creatures can serve such a critical role on our planet. I learned about the importance of bees for pollinating crops, and I read that their populations have been declining in recent years. I was determined to do my part to help. This wasn't just a hobby anymore—it was a mission((And the stakes just got higher.)). But like the bees I'd been reading about, I knew I couldn't do it alone. My years of abandoning hobbies had taught me that this time, I needed guidance from someone with experience. I knew the first place to look. At the farmer's market that Saturday, I went straight to the honey stand and introduced myself. The vendor's name was Jeremy, and he was excited to see someone so young taking up beekeeping. I asked if I could come see his hives sometime, and he agreed. I showed up the next weekend with my used beekeeping suit in hand. Jeremy gave me a tour. I was astounded by the simultaneous simplicity and complexity. As the months went by, Jeremy became my mentor. He taught me the importance of monitoring the health of the hive, how to properly harvest honey, and even the ins and outs of the farmer's market business. I was grateful for his guidance and friendship. I found myself becoming more and more passionate about bees and the art of beekeeping. After months of tending to my hive, I finally had it up and running. These bees were in my care((The writer has shown us that they've learned a big lesson from their past failures: they need support and guidance. I'm impressed that this time they are making an intentional change.))—this was one hobby I couldn't abandon. With that knowledge and Jeremy's support, one hive grew to five. I'm not in it for the money or even the honey. I'm in it for the bees, for the millimeter of difference I'm making in their lives and in the life of the earth. Through beekeeping, I have found a community of people who share my love for bees. Jeremy, the bees, and the entire beekeeping community have taught me not to quit. We support each other, share tips and advice, and work together to help protect these important insects. And in the process, I have learned that I can take up any new hobby I want and stick with it if I just put in enough effort((Yep—the writer has come out of this journey on the other side, having learned that their effort does pay off.)). AO Notes on Beekeeper's Club Grade: A- As an admissions officer, it's always fun to read about students' eccentric hobbies. I'd count this as one of them. But what's better than learning about the hobby is seeing a student's personal growth. What makes this essay good: Personal journey: Most good personal statements show some kind of personal growth. In this case, we see that the writer has grown mature and aware enough to hold down a hobby. We see that it wasn't an easy road, but they got there. Strengths: There are lots of strengths in this personal statement. We see self-awareness, initiative, teamwork, and care for the bees and the planet. Reflection: Part of what makes this personal journey so good is that the writer takes us on the journey with them through reflection. At each stage of the journey, we know exactly what the writer is thinking and feeling. By the end, we're celebrating their success with them. What the writer could do to level up: Personal meaning: Yep, "personal journey" and "personal meaning" can be two separate things. Although the writer goes on a great personal journey, the personal meaning seems to be lacking a bit. It's clear that this is an important topic to the writer, but it doesn't exactly come across as an especially vulnerable one. The writer could make it more vulnerable by incorporating more personal meaning into their reflection: what would it have meant if they had quit beekeeping too? What's the problem with dropping hobbies in the first place? Why is it personally important to learn to stick with things? Personal Statement Example #10: Ann Pushing her blonde curls from her forehead, she pursed her lips in focus((This vivid, detailed description really draws me in.)). She sat with legs crossed across the kitchen chair. This was it: the moment she'd been preparing for. Her tiny hand gripped the pencil as if it were a stick of dynamite and twitched her fingers up, down, and back again. She looked up at me and smiled, teeth too big for her growing mouth. "Ann," the paper read. As I glowed back at my mini-me, I saw in her my whole heart((And here the focus switches from Ann to the writer—an important transition.)). My sister was technically an accident, born when I was eleven years old. But I know that, in the grand scheme of things, Ann's existence was destined by the cosmos. Watching her write was like looking in a mirror. My hair has long since turned brown, but she and I deal with the same unmanageable curls. Her toothy grin developed over five years of mutual laughter. And she got that unwavering focus from watching me do my own homework each night. At the same time I've taught her the ways of the world, she's taught me joy, patience, and persistence((Lessons learned! This sentence really draws attention to the main theme. It could be a little more specific because "joy, patience, and persistence" are almost cliche.)). I had been an only child for my first decade of life. I remember being lonely and without purpose. With Ann came the opportunity to make a real impact on someone, even as a child myself. The night she was born, I vowed to protect her. I had never seen anyone so small and fragile, and I begged my parents to let me hold her. Next to mine, her hand looked like a doll's. It was purple and pink from the ordeal of birth. Her eyes barely opened, but I couldn't keep mine off her. Many older siblings find their younger siblings to be nuisances. But Ann has always been my best friend. Her first two years of life, she struggled with health issues that scared us all. I felt helpless and afraid, but I knew I had to fight alongside her. I did everything I could: I grabbed diapers and bottles for my parents, I talked to her for hours on end, and, when she was old enough, I spoon fed her and encouraged her to eat. As Ann grew bigger and stronger, I grew stronger, too((It sounds like this was a really difficult challenge for the writer and their family. I appreciate this picture we get of the writer in relation to Ann.)). Each year has gotten better than the previous. I was there to catch Ann when she took her first steps, teach her her first words, and get her dressed every day. She tagged behind me as I took photos before my first dance, got my learner's permit, and went on my college tours. While being a teen with a toddler sibling wasn't always perfect, Ann's mere presence makes those around her feel loved and appreciated. She's exactly who I aspire to be. Watching her write her name at the kitchen table, I became overwhelmed with the thought of leaving her to head off to college. She still has so much to learn, so many ways to grow. But just as the thought entered my mind, she spoke in her high-pitched and innocent voice. "When you go to college," she asked, "will you tell me about your classes?" I blinked away the tears gathering in my eyes, smoothed her curls with my hand, and pulled her in close. Going to college won't mean leaving Ann. It will mean opening her world—and mine—to endless new knowledge and possibilities. She'll grow and change, and so will I. When we reunite, we'll smile our toothy smiles and embrace each other, our curly hair intertwining. We'll sit at the kitchen table, focused and laughing, like nothing has changed((I like how the siblings are continuing to grow together, but at the end of the day, they still have their amazing relationship.)). AO Notes on Ann Grade: B+ I always find sibling essays like this one so sweet. It's amazing how clearly we can understand someone solely through their interactions with a loved one. As an admissions officer, I would see that this student would be a great community member (and roommate!). What makes this essay good: Deeply meaningful: Especially with the family context, it's apparent that this topic is deeply meaningful to the writer. Because it's so meaningful a topic, the writer is able to show an immense amount of care for Ann without even trying. AOs love seeing traits like care, maturity, and the ability to grow. Clear message: Personal statements should have themes that encompass the main message the writer wants to convey. This essay's message is clear as day: the writer is a better, happier, more generous person because of Ann. They are an awesome sibling. What the writer could do to level up: More about the self: This one's tricky because we get an implicit sense of who the writer is now through the overall tone and meaning. But a lot of the personal examples the writer chose are old examples from childhood and early adolescence. Some of those are important to provide family context, but I still would have liked to get a more recent picture of the writer. Personal Statement Example #11: Running through My Neighborhood My mind and eyes began to wander as I turned the corner on my fourth mile. I've always been a runner. It's a way for me to relax and challenge myself. Running makes me feel like I'm one with the world around me. As I run, I can't help but be struck by the beauty of the buildings and people that make up my city. Each is a work of art—a carefully-crafted expression of my community. With every step, I feel a deep connection to the life around me((This introduction covers a lot, so this last sentence could be a bit more specific.)). On my run, I find myself drawn to the intricate details of the buildings. I admire the way the light catches on centuries-old bricks, casting shadows that dance across the pavement below. I look up at the skyscraper windows that nearly touch the sky, frightened at the sight of window washers. Old and new, the buildings all carry stories. In the same way, I admire the neighbors around me. I see them feeding pigeons, smiling at me as I pass by. They're walking dogs and babies, talking on a park bench, and playing hopscotch. I run by them, fast but steady, and breathe it all in. I'm on this beautiful city block, surrounded by people whose whole lives are familiar yet mysterious, and I'm running. But it's not just the aesthetic beauty of the buildings that grabs my attention. As I run, I find myself thinking about the stories and histories behind each one. I wonder about the people who built them, the families they had at home, the lives they led. I think about the people who have lived and worked in these buildings and the memories that have been made within their walls. Take the local bakery, for instance. I've run by there a thousand times in my life, each time soaking up the smell of freshly-baked bread and pastries. The building seems unassuming at first, with a simple glass door and brick façade. But once you step foot inside, you're immediately hit with the warmth of the staff and patrons. The old photos on the wall and cozy furniture that has been there since the bakery's opening back in the 1950s—it feels like home((These are great vivid details.)). The bakery is everything I value about my neighborhood. It completely represents what kind of neighbor I want to be. Plus, it's not a bad place for a post-run snack. Through my runs, I've also made connections with those who frequent the sidewalks alongside me. One of the people I see regularly on my runs is Mrs. Carter, an elderly woman who always has a kind word and a smile for everyone she meets. Her white hair is carefully curled, and her face is dimpled with laugh lines from thousands of conversations like ours. She often stops to chat with me, asking how my day is going and sharing stories from her own life. I always look forward to seeing her. She's like the grandmother I never had. Mrs. Carter inspires me to be a better community member every day((This kind of reflection brings the focus back to the writer's personal journey.)). Running through my neighborhood is about more than just staying fit. It's also about being in community with those around me. As I weave through the people on the sidewalk, I feel as though I am weaving myself through their stories, picking up tidbits and adding them to my own narrative. I wouldn't be who I am today without these runs that have taught me so much. I can't wait to run across my college campus, admiring my new surroundings and meeting my new neighbors((I like this gesture to the future—as an AO, I would start to picture this student running through my campus, too!)). AO Notes on Running through My Neighborhood Grade: B Running essays can get a bad rap in college admissions. But this one overcomes that stereotype. At its core, this essay is about the runner's relationship to their community. I really appreciate how much care and enthusiasm this writer shows for those around them. What makes this essay good: Writing: The writer's voice shines through. They have great vivid descriptions, and we're really able to envision ourselves in the neighborhood alongside them. Personal meaning: The way the writer describes those they encounter in their neighborhood shows that this isn't a minor part of their life. Their runs are a big deal. The people they see along the way have greatly shaped who they are. What the writer could do to level up: Greater focus on self: Now, there are much worse culprits when it comes to personal essays that focus on people other than the writer. But the writer does toe the line. Their descriptions mostly focus on those around them, and while there is some reflection that connects their own experience to other people, it doesn't actually take up much space in the essay. To level up, the writer could make this essay more about themself. Personal Statement Example #12: Musical Installation Art As a child, I was always drawn to stringed instruments((The hook could have more punch, but this gets the job done.)). I would pluck at my dad's old guitars, create makeshift harps with dental floss, and even play around with the banjo and harp in music class. As I got older, I realized that I wanted to focus on making my own instruments. And where better to start than in my dad's scrapyard? The yard sprawled out for almost five acres behind our house. It was a marvel of junk and oddities, with the accumulated garbage from hundreds of junker cars built up in our backyard. I grew up playing there, leading a childhood that most parents would probably see as reckless—rolling tires through narrow alleyways between crushed cars stacked high. But for me, the backyard was an endless playground for my imagination. It was there that I discovered the joys of welding and soldering. I would rummage through piles of metal and find pieces that I could fashion into something new. My first sculptures were simple, resembling birds or dogs and pieced together from strips of metal. I'd look for similar art everywhere I went, grasping for inspiration. At a fair one weekend, I saw a booth run by an artist who built guitars. After speaking with him about his art, he asked to see a picture of my sculptures. I showed him and explained that I hoped to make my own instruments one day, too. He scuttled to the back of his tent and returned with a gift: a set of thick copper strings. "Try using those,"((What an endearing story.)) he told me. My first sculpture instrument was a crude thing—little more than a board of metal with pegs that I used to pull the copper strings tight. But I tightened them, I was in love—spending all night plucking away. At first, the instrument wailed and screeched. String by string, I delicately tuned the wires into sirens. I had created something that played music, and I was so proud. My experience building the instrument motivated me to enroll in a sculpture class at the local community college. It was there that I learned how to properly solder metal and create more complex structures. For my final project, I made a three-foot-tall, four-stringed metal instrument in the shape of a dragon. But as I worked, I started to realize that my dragon wasn't going to be beautiful in the traditional sense. Its metal body was jagged and uneven, and the strings were stretched tight across its back in a way that produced discordant, almost abrasive music. I tried to adjust the tuning, but no matter what I did, the music remained harsh and unpleasant. At first, I was disappointed. I wanted my dragon to be a work of art, something that people would marvel at and love listening to. But as I continued to play with it, I started to see the beauty in the chaos((This paragraph shows wonderful growth. And as a reader, I'm drawn in trying to imagine what the sculpture actually looks like.)). The music it produced was like a musical language that I had invented, one that was wild and untamed. It was a reflection of my own creativity and individuality. A discordant collection of notes that sounded like they'd been tuned so as to be atonal. But I didn't care. I was a scrapyard kid, and this dragon played the song of my people: strong, innovative, and beautiful. The combination of sculpture and music fascinates me. How does the shape of a fabrication affect the kind of sound that the object produces? What sounds do different materials produce? As I've learned more about sculpture, I've also become interested in installation art that has sound dimensions. I want to capture people's visual and aural attention to inspire questions about how we navigate the aesthetic world((It sounds like this topic potentially relates to the student's future goals. If that's true, there could be a clearer academic connection here.)). And I'll use whatever scraps I can find to make my creations. AO Notes on Musical Installation Art Grade: B+ I don't think I've ever seen a piece of musical installation art myself, so this topic really held my attention. I appreciate the journey the writer went on to learn that their art may not look like everyone else's, but it can be just as impactful. What makes this essay good: Topic: I like this topic not only because it's not one you see every day but also because it lets the writer reveal a lot about themself and their background. We see where they grew up and who they grew up with, and we also learn about this deeply meaningful personal interest. Writing style: This author has a very distinct writing style. In some ways, the writing style mirrors their art style—abrupt at times, melodic at others. What the writer could do to level up: Organization: The first half of this essay doesn't always match up with the second half. Even though we're still able to see the writer's journey as a metal artist and musician, there's still a bit of streamlining that needs to happen. Personal Statement Example #13: Ski Patrol I can never get enough of being in the mountains((This hook isn't very compelling, so it could use some more attention.)). I am a skier through and through. Growing up, I spent countless family vacations on the slopes with my dad and siblings. I love the rush I get speeding down the mountain—I've improved so much over my life that I can now handle most runs I come across. But last year, I took my love for skiing to a whole other level by joining ski patrol. It was mid-December, and my family had decided to take a weekend away to go skiing. Everything was going normally at first. We had a good day on the slopes and wanted to go one more run before calling it a night. We took a moment to rest and watched the person in front of us go. Only seconds after she headed down the mountain, something happened with her ski. She catapulted into a nearby tree. People raced to check on her, while we stayed back and alerted ski patrol. When ski patrol arrived, I watched in amazement. They moved in such a precise way. They were like a machine—everyone knew exactly what to do when. Thankfully, it was a false alarm and the skier only had a few scratches. But my own life was changed forever. I knew then that I wanted to be a part of this team, to help others in a tangible way and to make a difference on the mountain that had always been my home. As soon as I could, I applied for the Junior Ski Patrol team. I had to go through a tryout process on the hill, which made me nervous. But it felt good to be surrounded by people who loved skiing as much as I do. Thankfully, I was accepted shortly after; it was one of the best days of my life. Now on Junior Ski Patrol, I have the opportunity to do what I love – skiing – while also making a positive impact on others((And here we get to the heart of the essay. The writer wants to help others while doing something they love. It's a noble pursuit!)). My team shadows the adult Ski Patrol, and we learn a lot of lessons along the way. On the mountain (and in life), you never know what challenges might arise. One of the most important things I've learned from Junior Ski Patrol is to be prepared for anything. I've gotten my CPR and first aid certifications so I'm always prepared to administer life-saving care to anyone who might need it. I know how to pack a bag full of enough essentials to survive harsh weather or injuries. But ski patrol has also taught me so much more than just how to help others. It has shown me how I work best on a team. I'm not naturally a leader, which is something I've always felt ashamed about. After learning from our mentors who all fulfill different roles on their adult Ski Patrol team, I realized that I don't have to be a leader to be a good team member. The quiet collaborators who can follow the lead, take initiative when needed, and do their jobs really well are just as important as the people who are front-and-center((An important personal insight.)). Being on ski patrol as a high school student has been an incredible journey, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such a dedicated team. More importantly, I'm proud of the growth I've experienced. I went from a person who just loves skiing to a person who is more confident in herself. I no longer feel unprepared or timid. I know exactly how to keep myself safe and work alongside others. While I don't want to be a professional Ski Patroller or even go into medicine, I know these lessons will serve me well wherever life takes me((As an AO, I would have been wondering if being on JSP made them want to study medicine, so I appreciate that they answered it for me!)). But no matter where I end up, when the mountain calls, you know I'll answer. AO Notes on Ski Patrol Grade: B In this fun hobby-meets-accomplishment essay, the writer shows us their strengths of care and teamwork. I like the crossover between something that they really enjoy and this impressive accomplishment they have of being on Junior Ski Patrol. What makes this essay good: Lessons learned: The writer makes it very clear what lessons they learned from Junior Ski Patrol. Lessons don't always have to be this explicit, but I appreciate how the writer really takes the time to reflect on what they've learned. Personal insight: Okay, this point is related to the lessons learned. But it's important to draw out on its own because personal essays are, of course, personal. This topic easily could have been just about skiing down a mountain or administering first aid on patrol. Instead, the writer kept the focus inward to meet the expectations of a personal essay. What the writer could do to level up: What's at stake?: We do get a good sense of personal meaning. But the writer could do a better job of speaking to the significance of this activity to their life. A good question to ask is, "What's at stake?" What would I have lost or gained if this story had turned out differently? Asking these questions can also help you figure out what it is that you want an admissions officer to learn from your personal statement. Personal Statement Example #14: The Regulars One pump of vanilla syrup. Frothed milk. One espresso shot. Caramel drizzle((Starting with some version of the following sentence would have been a stronger hook.)). Like a scientist at her bench, I have methodically repeated these steps four days a week for the past two years. During my time as a Starbucks barista, I've learned hundreds of recipes and customizations. I know all the secret menu hacks, and I've developed several recipes for friends and family too. I pride myself on speed, quality, and memory. My favorite part of the job is the customer service. As one of the busiest locations in the region, I've caffeinated thousands. But it's my regular customers, those whose orders I know like the back of my hand, who have truly impacted me. Venti Vanilla Sweet Cream Cold Brew, hold the vanilla syrup. A busy mom of four, Chelsea is always in a hurry. I try to catch her the moment she enters the store so I can get started right away. Her Venti drink fuels her through school dropoffs and pickups, gymnastics lessons, and evening math homework. Throughout my conversations with her, I've learned that Chelsea is a scheduling virtuoso. As someone with ADHD((This paragraph is almost too much about Chelsea, so this sentence is crucial to bring the focus back to the writer.)), I became so inspired by her ability to juggle so many people and schedules simultaneously. After asking her for advice, she helped me find a time management system that I can keep up with. I have Chelsea to thank for my improved grades. Grande dark roast, no room for cream. Mr. Williams is a retired businessman who always tips 100%. Mr. Williams is a quiet man, so it took me months to draw any information from him. Instead of using my over-the-top customer service voice, I eventually learned to be myself. When I got him to open up, I discovered that he was a service worker himself before he made it big in business in his sixties. The truth is, Mr. Williams has tipped me hundreds of dollars throughout my time here, which is extra money that will help me pay for college. He's taught me the value of quiet generosity((Let's be honest. Mr. Williams sounds like a cool guy. But Mr. Williams isn't applying to college—the writer is! I like that we get small glimpses into who the writer is through this paragraph, but there's still room for more.)). Tall soy London Fog. Sweet Darla gave up coffee twenty-five years ago, but she still loves an occasional treat. When Darla enters, I clear my schedule. She always has stories to tell about the eighty years of life she's lived. Darla is everything I want to be at that age: she's spunky, opinionated, and hilarious((Here we learn a lot about the writer through Darla.)). Sometimes I tell Darla stories of my own. When I explained the dramatic series of events that led to me landing first chair in my symphony, she said she was going to retell it her bridge club. Making Darla laugh so hard will always be one of my proudest moments. Grande iced matcha. Taylor is my age and goes to my school. When I took her order for the first time, I felt embarrassed that I needed to work to support myself while she could enjoy expensive drinks. But her kindness softened me. As time went on, I learned that she visited Starbucks so much because she wanted to get out of her house, which wasn't a very happy place. While I have to take on as many shifts as possible, I still have a happy home to return to afterward. Now Taylor comes in near the end of my shift so we can take our drinks and have dinner at my house. When you work in customer service, customers enter and exit your life like a revolving door. But the regulars, those special people who draw connections from daily but brief interactions, stick with you for life. I wouldn't be who I am today if it weren't for these people, and I would never have met them if it weren't for my job as a barista. I haven't just been making drinks these past two years. I've been making friends((The conclusion does a good job tying all these different stories back together.)). AO Notes on The Regulars Grade: B No one appreciates a good barista story more than a tired admissions officer on their 30th application of the day! I like the personality that comes through in this essay especially. But this is one of those cases where it's almost too much about other people. What makes this essay good: Creative take: Not every college essay needs a creative flair. In fact, sometimes going for "unique" structures can detract from an essay. But I like how the writer uses this format to structure the essay. Organization: This essay isn't one a reader is bound to get lost in. The introduction sets up the essay well, it's easy to see the connections between the points the writer is conveying, and the conclusion brings the focus back to the writer. What the writer could do to level up: More focus on self: While we do learn about the writer in this essay, we also learn a lot about Chelsea, Mr. Williams, Darla, and Taylor. The writer could have pared down the descriptions of other people—or cut one of the examples altogether—to save more room for personal reflection. "Bad" Personal Statement Examples These "bad" essays aren't necessarily bad. They just aren't very effective personal statements. Specifically, these two essays make some of the biggest college essay mistakes. Making mistakes, especially when you've never written a personal statement before, is to be expected. We've included these examples so you can see what those mistakes look like in real-time. Learning from ineffective examples can be just as helpful as learning from the exceptional ones, so grab your pencil and start taking notes. Our admissions officers have highlighted what's working and what's not. They offer helpful commentary and advice for revisions that you can use to assess your own personal statement. Personal Statement Example #15: The Worst Year My sophomore year of high school presented me with so many challenges((This hook definitely gets straight to the point, but it doesn't draw me in as a reader.)). I struggled with a lot that year and barely managed to get by. It was the greatest challenge I ever faced. The year started out like any other but soon went into chaos. My brother suddenly started struggling with drugs and alcohol. Before that, we didn't know how bad he was hurting. But one night he finally came to us for help because apparently he had been using substances to cope with his emotions. He was scared because he felt like he had reached a breaking point and needed support. My parents didn't want to help because they thought that he didn't have a problem but I know my brother and I knew that he didn't seem like himself. It was so sad to watch him go through that. I tried my best to help him but I was only a kid. I couldn't really do anything besides tell him I loved him. Eventually my parents decided to get him some help, so he went away for a while and I wrote him letters every week and visited him as much as I could. The treatment he got helped thankfully. He's doing better now and I am grateful that he is my brother. But then Covid hit and I couldn't even leave my house. We thought it would just be a two week vacation to school but it turned into two whole years of my life gone just like that. At the beginning I was stuck in my bedroom while my parents were working their jobs from the living room. Everyone was constantly getting annoyed with each other and driving each other wild. I would be doing a class Zoom in my room and I could hear my parents in a meeting in the living room. I had a hard time not being able to see my friends. I couldn't focus and my grades dropped. Even my teachers didn't really seem to care. I was sick of staring at black Zoom screens all the time that I even stopped logging on. All of that combined led to me becoming very depressed and anxious. My grades dropped even more because I just couldn't pay attention or focus enough to do my homework. I ended up getting grades way lower than I ever thought I would that year and I'm so frustrated about it because it felt like I was trying my best but it just wasn't enough((Here we see the writer opening up a bit and reflecting on what it was like to go through that experience.)). Even once we finally got back in school things didn't get much better. The pandemic was just too much for my family so my parents ended up getting divorced at the beginning of my junior year. After all we had been through together seeing them separate made me devastated. My dad got an apartment and I had to go back and forth between their houses and pack up all my stuff every time. It was like moving my entire life every weekend. My brother was out of the house by this point so it was just me all by myself. My school was far from my dad's new place so I'd have a long commute on the weeks I was with him. He was stressed at work and about the divorce and I just ended up feeling so lonely and spending most of my time in my room. My grades got better once online school stopped((This moment of hope does a lot for moving the essay forward.)) but I had a hard time keeping close relationships with my friends because they didn't like that I was living far away now and that we couldn't really hang out anymore. I couldn't believe that two years would change so much. Getting through everything really challenged me. But I'm glad to be moving forward with my life. AO Notes on The Worst Year Grade: C This student definitely had a challenging year. It's clear that they've overcome a lot, and I appreciate their willingness to share their struggles. I like that the very last sentence What this essay does well: Vulnerability: Writing about challenges is never easy, especially when you're writing to people you don't know. This writer is bold and unafraid in doing so. What could be improved on: Not enough positivity: Here's the thing. You definitely don't need to be able to spin all of your challenging experiences into positive ones. But the topics you choose to write your college essay about should ultimately conclude on a positive note. You want your college essay to show you in a positive light, so you should choose a topic that lets you find a light, positive, or hopeful resolution. Personal Statement Example #16: The Strikeout that Changed My Life The stadium lights shone brightly in my eyes. I stepped up to the plate and drew back my bat. I wiggled my fingers, waiting. The pitcher wound up his arm and threw the ball towards me. My eyes worked overtime to track the ball. I watched as it flew directly towards the center of the plate and made a last-minute curve((I like this vivid description.)). It went straight into the catcher's mitt. "Strike three!" the umpire yelled. That was the time I struck out at the quarter-finals. My team was so close to making it to the championship that we could taste it. It was the bottom of the sixth, and I gave up a valuable chance to score game-winning runs. We ended up losing. I learned a valuable lesson that fateful day. I never wanted to let my team down like that again((And the writer jumps quickly into the main theme of the essay. Still, the message here could be more specific.)). We had advanced through our bracket without much trouble. The other teams were no match for our work ethic and teamwork. We were in perfect sync. As the first baseman, I was ready for any throw that came my way. We were also hitting well. I scored three home runs throughout the course of the tournament. We were a high-functioning machine. But for a machine to work, each cog has to function correctly. When I stepped up to the plate in the sixth inning, I was a broken cog. After our quarter–final loss, I grieved with my teammates. Then I went off on my own to think. How had I let my team down so badly? How did I not even try to swing at that pitch? It was all my fault. I had to figure out what I had done wrong so I would never make the mistake again. I realized that I had been thinking selfishly. I was concerned about my own performance, my own at-bat averages((This is a good reflection.)). I was scared of failing because I didn't want to be embarrassed. And worrying about all of those things caused me to lose focus and miss my chance to make a difference. Instead, I should have been thinking about how my at-bat would contribute to my team's overall goal of winning the game. I returned to where my teammates were congregating, and several of them patted me on the back. The next day, we went over how the game went as a team and talked about how we could improve at our tournament the following weekend. I admitted that I felt like I let the team down. My teammates said that they understood and reassured me that mistakes happen. It wasn't my failed at-bat alone that lost us the game. Like winning, losing is a team effort. It was a culmination of lots of little issues. At the end of the day, the other team just out-performed us. But we could try hard, practice a lot, and return triumphant next weekend. Letting my team down was a crushing blow to my self-esteem. I never want to feel like that again, but I know that the experience caused me to grow. Through all of this, I learned that I have to trust myself and my team((Here we get to the lesson learned.)). Focusing on myself alone can only get me so far. But focusing on my team can get me to where I want to go. I'm actually thankful that I struck out in that sixth inning because it caused me to learn an important life lesson. AO Notes on The Strikeout that Changed My Life Grade: B- This essay on its own definitely isn't "bad." As far as essays go, it's clear, well-written, and organized nicely. But as a college essay, it could be doing more work on the writer's behalf. See, as an admissions officer, I don't actually learn that much about the writer from this essay alone. I see that they like baseball, are a good teammate, and can overcome failure. Those are wonderful traits, but they don't exactly help set this student apart on the admissions committee floor. Instead, the student could make this essay more vulnerable and personal. What this essay does well: Writing: The writer uses some great creative writing skills to really set the scene for the readers. In that first paragraph, I really feel like I'm there watching the game. Reflection: Even though the topic could be more significant, the writer does a great job reflecting on the meaning they drew from the experience. What could be improved on: Significance: It's very clear that this topic holds a lot of meaning to the writer. But as a college essay topic, it lacks vulnerability and stakes. Key Takeaways Writing a personal statement is a difficult ask, especially when you've never even read one before. But now, with these fifteen examples in your back pocket, you're ready to write your own