

## Summer Assignment: Rising 12<sup>th</sup> Graders (Current 11<sup>th</sup> Graders)

You're almost there! Congratulations on entering your final year as a high school student. This summer assignment is intended to help you prepare for the college essay/personal statement. Carefully read the entire packet. We have provided successful sample college essays with commentary when it was available. These should help you think about the subject of your own personal statement and how you might present it.

After **carefully** reviewing the packet, you are to come to school with TWO different college essay drafts (typed or neatly handwritten) and a completed resume (typed). For the college essay drafts, one should be the topic about which you feel most comfortable writing. For the second one, "think outside the box" or go outside of your comfort zone. Write the essay you never thought you'd write. You might surprise yourself. When you return, your senior English teacher will help you choose, review, and edit your personal statement.

Lastly, college students are avid readers. Take some time to read whatever makes you happy this summer. ☺

### The Common Application Essay 2017-2018 Prompts

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story. **[No change]**
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? **[Revised]**
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome? **[Revised]**
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution. **[No change]**
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. **[Revised]**
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more? **[New]**
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design. **[New]**

**Word Limit: 650**

#### Keep in Mind:

- It's perfectly fine, expected even, for you to use the first person. Write formally, but personally. You can use "I" here; it's about YOU!
- Offer a sense of hope or positivity, even regarding the most difficult experiences.
- Tell the reader a story.
- Include a title.
- Think outside the box; don't go for the clichéd responses. Remember, the people who read these essays read hundreds, even thousands of them.
- Think: how does this essay demonstrate how I will fit into and contribute to this university's community?
- After you read the sample essays, read the commentary by the admissions officers. They provide invaluable insight into what they are looking for.

**From the Johns Hopkins blog, *Hopkins Insider*:**

So how exactly do you go about conveying that very message to our Admissions Counselors? Here are a few tips to help you nail your college essays (straight from our Admissions Counselors themselves!):

- **Write about *your* personal experiences.** You can write about a family member, coach, teacher, etc., **but we are looking to admit you, not your grandmother.**
- **Don't try and include everything.** Focus on one topic, not everything you've been involved in during high school. Essays are a chance to elaborate on something that is important to you.
- **Tell us something about you that we won't get to see anywhere else in the application.** Listing extracurricular involvements again is a missed opportunity to show a different aspect of you.
- **Pull us in from the beginning.** An attention-grabbing intro is the first step to a memorable essay. We read thousands of applications and your GPA and testing are important, but not what sets you apart—that is your essay.
- **Answer the question** that is being asked in the prompt.
- **Be conscious of hot topic issues and potentially controversial topics** (politics, religion, war, pending/recently passed legislation). If an opinion or idea is an important part of who you are, don't be afraid to write about, but be sure to be respectful of both sides of any issue and remember that regardless of your individual opinions, your essay is a professional document.
- **Write naturally.** Use your voice to show your personality. Be expressive, but your goal shouldn't be to dazzle us with your word choice (or command of a thesaurus).
- **Be you.** Your essay can be funny, if that is your personality. But if you don't consider yourself funny, this isn't the space to try to be.
- **Edit and proofread your essays carefully.** Then have someone else, preferably a teacher or counselor, edit and proofread them as well. Spell-check doesn't catch everything.

### **College Essay Brainstorming Questions**

1. What are your major accomplishments, and why do you consider them accomplishments? Do not limit yourself to accomplishments you have been formally recognized for since the most interesting essays often are based on accomplishments that may have been trite at the time but become crucial when placed in the context of your life.
2. Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
3. Consider your favorite books, movies, works of art, etc. Have these influenced your life in a meaningful way? Why are they your favorites?
4. What was the most difficult time in your life, and why? How did your perspective on life change as a result of the difficulty?
5. Have you ever struggled mightily for something and succeeded? What made you successful?
6. Have you ever struggled mightily for something and failed? How did you respond?
7. Of everything in the world, what would you most like to be doing right now? Where would you most like to be? Who, of everyone living and dead, would you most like to be with? These questions should help you realize what you love most.
8. Have you experienced a moment of epiphany, as if your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to?
9. What is your strongest, most unwavering personality trait? Do you maintain strong beliefs or adhere to a philosophy? How would your friends characterize you? What would they write about if they were writing your admissions essay for you?
10. What have you done outside of the classroom that demonstrates qualities sought after by universities? Of these, which means the most to you?
11. What are your most important extracurricular or community activities? What made you join these activities? What made you continue to contribute to them?

12. What are your dreams of the future? When you look back on your life in thirty years, what would it take for you to consider your life successful? What people, things, and accomplishments do you need? How does this particular university fit into your plans for the future?
13. Write about something you love to do.
14. Describe a person you admire.
15. What is a book you love?

**27 Offbeat College Essay Topics**  
Let's take a look at some of the stranger questions those wacky admissions officers have asked.

How do you feel about <b>WEDNESDAY?</b> University of Chicago	What <b>outrages</b> you? Wake Forest	Write a haiku, limerick, or short poem that best represents you. NYU
In the year 2050, a <b>movie</b> is being made of your life. Please tell us the name of your movie and briefly summarize the story line. NYU	What do you hope to find over the <b>rainbow?</b> University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	What <b>sets your heart on fire?</b> Villanova University
<b>You have 150 words. Take a risk.</b> Notre Dame	Give us your <b>TOP TEN LIST.</b> Wake Forest University	You've just reached your 1 millionth hit on your <b>YouTube video.</b> What is the video about? Lehigh University
<i>So where is <b>Waldo</b>, really?</i> University of Chicago	<b>WHAT IS COLLEGE FOR?</b> Hampshire College	How are <b>apples</b> and <b>oranges</b> supposed to be compared? University of Chicago
If you could choose to be raised by robots, dinosaurs, or aliens, who would you pick? Why? Brandeis University	Please describe a <b>daily routine</b> or tradition of yours that may seem ordinary to others but holds special meaning for you. Why is this practice significant to you? Barnard	Make a bold prediction about something in <b>THE YEAR 2020</b> that no one else has made a bold prediction about. University of Virginia
What <b>invention</b> would the world be better off without and why? Kalamazoo College	<b>KERMIT the FROG</b> famously lamented, "It's not easy being green." Do you agree? Tufts	To <b>TWEET or not to TWEET?</b> University of Virginia, Charlottesville
Tell us the question you think a <b>selective college</b> should ask. How would you answer it? Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley	What <b>does #YOLO mean to you?</b> Tufts	You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit Page 217. UPenn
<b>Are we alone?</b> Tufts	Most overrated superhero? Most underrated superhero? Former kindergarten fear? Advice for adults? Gadget that needs inventing? UNC Chapel Hill	What is your <b>favorite word</b> and why? University of Virginia
How did you get caught? (Or not caught, as the case may be.) University of Chicago	<b>Could my brain be evil?</b> All Souls College	Write a short story using one of the following titles: a) House of Cards b) The Poor Sport c) Drama at the Prom d) Election Night, 2044 e) The Getaway Tufts

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### Some Less Traditional Prompts

1. If you were to write the story of your life until now, what would you title it and why?
2. Celebrate your nerdy side.
3. What do you see as the biggest threat to civility?
4. Pick one woman (or person) in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about?
5. You've just reached your one millionth hit on your YouTube video. What is the video about?
6. What's so odd about odd numbers?
7. Why are you here and not somewhere else?
8. Tell us about a time when you experienced a 'micro-moment of connection.' What did you learn?
9. What one invention would you uninvent if you could, and why?
10. Tell us about an unjust law, written or unwritten, that you believe should be broken.
11. You are writing your autobiography. Imagine what you would say on page 54 about yourself and your experiences.
12. Imagine a scientist and artist coming together for a conversation about color. How do you think this exchange would go?
13. The founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross described education as 'the art of helping young people to completeness.' How are you incomplete?
14. Every name tells a story: Tell us about your name — any name: first, middle, last, nickname — and its origin.
15. When you meet someone for the first time, what do you want them to know about you, but generally don't tell them?
16. What's a question that has changed how you understand the world? What changed?
17. How do you define yourself?

### Sample Essays That Work

#### Sample #1: String Theory

If string theory is really true, then the entire world is made up of strings, and I cannot tie a single one. This past summer, I applied for my very first job at a small, busy bakery and café in my neighborhood. I knew that if I were hired there, I would learn how to use a cash register, prepare sandwiches, and take cake orders. I imagined that my biggest struggle would be catering to demanding New Yorkers, but I never thought that it would be the benign act of tying a box that would become both my biggest obstacle and greatest teacher.

On my first day of work in late August, one of the bakery's employees hastily explained the procedure. It seemed simple: wrap the string around your hand, then wrap it three times around the box both ways, and knot it. I recited

the anthem in my head, “three times, turn it, three times, knot” until it became my mantra. After observing multiple employees, it was clear that anyone tying the box could complete it in a matter of seconds. For weeks, I labored endlessly, only to watch the strong and small pieces of my pride unravel each time I tried.

As I rushed to discreetly shove half-tied cake boxes into plastic bags, I could not help but wonder what was wrong with me. I have learned Mozart arias, memorized the functional groups in organic chemistry, and calculated the anti-derivatives of functions that I will probably never use in real life—all with a modest amount of energy. For some reason though, after a month's effort, tying string around a cake box still left me in a quandary.

As the weeks progressed, my skills slowly began to improve. Of course there were days when I just wanted to throw all of the string in the trash and use Scotch tape; this sense of defeat was neither welcome nor wanted, but remarks like “Oh, you must be new” from snarky customers catapulted my determination to greater heights.

It should be more difficult to develop an internal pulse and sense of legato in a piece of music than it is to find the necessary rhythm required to tie a box, but this seemingly trivial task has clearly proven not to be trivial at all. The difficulties that I encountered trying to keep a single knot intact are proof of this. The lack of cooperation between my coordination and my understanding left me frazzled, but the satisfaction I felt when I successfully tied my first box was almost as great as any I had felt before.

Scientists developing string theory say that string can exist in a straight line, but it can also bend, oscillate, or break apart. I am thankful that the string I work with is not quite as temperamental, but I still cringe when someone asks for a chocolate mandel bread. Supposedly, the string suggested in string theory is responsible for unifying general relativity with quantum physics. The only thing I am responsible for when I use string is delivering someone's pie to them without the box falling apart. Tying a cake box may not be quantum physics, but it is just as crucial to holding together what matters.

I am beginning to realize that I should not be ashamed if it takes me longer to learn. I persist, and I continue to tie boxes every weekend at work. Even though I occasionally backslide into feelings of exasperation, I always rewrap the string around my hand and start over because I have learned that the most gratifying victories come from tenacity. If the universe really is comprised of strings, I am confident that I will be able to tie them together, even if I do have to keep my fingers crossed that my knots hold up. (638 words)

Commentary (from Johns Hopkins Admissions Counselor)

*“Joanna does a great job of grabbing your attention from the first sentence by comparing her struggles learning to tie up bakery boxes to string theory. We get a glimpse at her personality throughout the essay—she is not afraid to laugh at herself or admit failure. She uses her story to illustrate that she recognized a weakness, refused to give up, and is able to grow from it; which gives us a sense of how she will tackle challenges here at JHU. Her voice definitely came through in this essay. She also used the space effectively to tell us a lot about who she is—her love of music and science, her dedication to a part-time job, and her ability to put things in perspective. Even though the actual topic itself—learning to tie string around bakery orders—seems narrow in scope, it allowed us to see how well-rounded her interests were and really get to know her through her writing.”*

### **Sample #2, Viviana Andazola Marquez, Yale University (winner of *NYTimes* college essay contest)**

There it sits, sullen in the passenger's seat like a child in time out. Here we go again — someone else's laptop to navigate, another Wi-Fi network to hack, another stubborn connection to overcome. After a frustrating drive through the neighborhood and careful identification of a network, success is stated simply: Connected. It is a brief moment of victory, but short-lived as I race against the clock to complete my stack of assignments. Sure, it would be ideal to have my own Wi-Fi, but I'd be satisfied if my family obtained a home first. Every day there is a new challenge; it is a game of adaptation: I beat each situation before it beats me.

Just as in any game, I endure losses and gains. I can never forget the classic motel stays. The countless notes that stated in all capitals "MUST EVACUATE BY 4PM" were my cues to negotiate with the manager to give us one more day to make our payments. I learned where \$5 would buy enough food to feed a family of 5, bus routes, which neighbors were willing to give me rides to the college for my 7 a.m. class, which teachers were able to pick me up. I moved myself around the game board. I carried my family on my back.

During the bitter winter of 2012, I reached a dead end. My family was denied residence in a homeless shelter due to my mother's legal status. Finally, a stranger offered us refuge. Every night, my mother, sister, toddler brothers and I arranged ourselves on her kitchen floor and turned on the oven, hoping the warmth would embrace us through the night. What were we going to do? Surely, we couldn't live in front of an oven forever, but I couldn't see my next move.

My mother agreed it would be best for me to stay with a friend for a few days. I would have meals and a ride to school. I avoided the thought of what would happen to my brothers, and I made my way out to temporary stability. For a few moments, the weight of my family slid off my back, just long enough for me to regain my concentration and my faith in the future. I continually struggle with balancing my family's needs and my own, even though I know that in the end they are one and the same.

My whole existence is devoted to maximizing my potential. By tapping into a stranger's Wi-Fi, negotiating with hotel managers, accepting the kindness of strangers, and sometimes, just for a short time, putting my own needs before my family's, I fill the cracks in the road to success made by forces beyond myself. I won't let these circumstances victimize me. I won't let guilt paralyze me. I remain in control, making my moves, winning the game. Attending college is the surest path to victory, and I am prepared to play along until I reach the end. (495 words)

#### **Commentary (from nytimes.com):**

*Mr. Quinlan accepted Viviana Andazola Marquez, who lives in Thornton, Colo., into the class of 2018. Her short, matter-of-fact essay about the logistics of homelessness was the most powerful one we read.*

*"There it sits, sullen in the passenger's seat like a child in time out," she wrote of her frequent attempts to get her homework done using borrowed computers. "Here we go again — someone else's laptop to navigate, another Wi-Fi network to hack, another stubborn connection to overcome. After a frustrating drive through the neighborhood and careful identification of a network, success is stated simply: connected."*

*Ms. Delahunty was struck by two things in this essay. The first was the language. "This is almost like a poem, it's so laconic and compressed," she said. "I fill the cracks in the road to success made by forces beyond myself." What a beautiful line."*

*The second was the lack of bitterness, which Mr. Quinlan picked up on as well. "She uses the story to her advantage but she doesn't lament it," he said. "Lots of people write about obstacles, but there is a forward-looking nature to this. It's a look at what she's overcome without her steeping in it."*

#### **Sample #3: Temper-Morley**

I feel perfectly content at Woodrow Wilson Skateboard Park, a cement swell in the ground located just west of the easternmost point of the north side of Chicago and trapped perennially in the mental space inhabited by fourteen-year-old angry youths. Outside of home and school, it is the place where I have spent most of my life. Its terrain so familiar, I could navigate it blindfolded, towed on my board by a pack of feral dogs. Much of what I know of life, I learned there.

A sea of nods and handshakes and back pats welcomes my every arrival to this municipal oasis. Here, I am known. Called variously Mor, Bob Morley, Mordog, Mo, Mo Money, or (long story) Tom Pork. It is the only place on earth where (were an election ever to be held) I could almost certainly be mayor. Among the strange, sometimes

downcast, and essentially good people here, I have found another family. I need them as much as they need me and as much as we all need skateboarding. This four-wheeled toy brings us inner peace. Skateboarding is a standing meditation, a time to put conscious thought aside and let primal impulse guide the body through various jumps and balancing acts. I turn to skating in times of joy and in times of strife, to celebrate a good day, escape writer's block, social failures, or other minor tragedies.

It is at Wilson that I encountered once, and then again, a man called Temper. I was thirteen when I crashed into a beefy shadowy figure I had heard talked about only in whispers. This man, known by the word he had chosen to affix to hundreds of walls around Chicago, had earned a spot in the community as a respected graffiti artist and skateboarder. His improbably light feet and on-board grace were known to most of the city. I was barely inaugurated into the park scene when I plowed headlong into him, knocking both of us down, turtle-like and winded. I hadn't been paying attention and apologized rapid-fire while trying to scrape my body off of his. When we both got to our feet, Temper knocked me down again and walked away without comment. It was the most frightening thing that ever happened to me at Wilson. He left the park that day, and I had seen him once, maybe twice, since.

The five years since the incident have been more or less good to me. In high school, I abandoned the dream of becoming a professional skateboarder and discovered a fuller gamut of life's offerings. I learned to think about things other than skating and in turn discovered physics, girls, cooking, and writing—a pursuit I love as much as skateboarding. The same cannot be said for the passage of time in Temper's life. I saw him recently and had lunch with him and my friend. He told us of overcoming a crippling drug addiction, spending time in jail, and contracting AIDS—a disease that every day reminds him that his time on earth is coming to an end. He is trying his best to make the most of it all. It was with the greatest trepidation that I told him about the Wilson incident. Over pizza and lemon soda, I explained how much he had scared me. I added that it was important that it had happened. I think it helped me grow up, I explained. An awkward silence followed. His head turned down and to the side for a moment. Then he just laughed. His eyes apologized, and I laughed too, collectively embracing that very Wilson mentality: life, like skateboarding and men named "Temper," will knock you down. There is nothing else to do but forgive, forget, and stand back up. (627 words)

#### **Commentary:**

#### **Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee:**

*"Morley's structure for the essay is measured with each paragraph transitioning to a different personal quality. He sets the scene and characters, and then shifts into the meat of the essay, writing about how a specific incident epitomizes the park experience. The essay beautifully ties in Morley's personality with his experiences at Woodrow Wilson. His focus is always on developing how the park has shaped HIM. After reading the essay, I have a much better understanding of who Morley is and what qualities he will bring to Hopkins. We get the sense that he is reflective and authentic—the type of JHU student you'd want as your lab partner or in your writing group."*

#### **Sample #4: The Unathletic Department—Meghan**

A blue seventh place athletic ribbon hangs from my mantel. Every day, as I walk into my living room, the award mockingly congratulates me as I smile. Ironically, the blue seventh place ribbon resembles the first place ribbon in color; so, if I just cover up the tip of the seven, I may convince myself that I championed the fourth heat. But, I never dare to wipe away the memory of my seventh place swim; I need that daily reminder of my imperfection. I need that seventh place.

Two years ago, I joined the no-cut swim team. That winter, my coach unexpectedly assigned me to swim the 500 freestyle. After stressing for hours about swimming 20 laps in a competition, I mounted the blocks, took my mark, and swam. Around lap 14, I looked around at the other lanes and did not see anyone. "I must be winning!" I thought to myself. However, as I finally completed my race and lifted my arms up in victory to the eager applause of the fans, I looked up at the score board. I had finished my race in last place. In fact, I left the pool two minutes after the second-to-last competitor, who now stood with her friends, wearing all her clothes.

The blue for the first loser went to me.

However, as I walked back to my team, carrying the seventh place blue, listening to the splash of the new event's swimmers, I could not help but smile. I could smile because despite my loss, life continued; the next event began. I realized that I could accept this failure, because I should not take everything in life so seriously. Why should I not laugh at the image of myself, raising my arms up in victory only to have finished last? I certainly did not challenge the school record, but that did not mean I could not enjoy the swim.

So, the blue seventh place ribbon sits there, on my mantel, for the world to see. I feel no shame in that. In fact, my memorable 20 laps mean more to me than an award because over time, the blue of the seventh place ribbon fades, and I become more colorful by embracing my imperfections and gaining resilience-but not athleticism. (378 words)

**Commentary:**

Senior Assistant Director Janice Heitsenrether:

*"The first thing that stands out about this essay is the catchy title, which effectively sets up an essay that is charmingly self-deprecating. The author goes on to use subtle humor throughout the essay to highlight one of her weaknesses but at the same time reveals how she turned what some might have considered a negative event into a positive learning experience. Not only is this essay well-written and enjoyable to read, but it reveals some important personal qualities about the author that we might not have learned about her through other components of her application. We get a glimpse of how she constructively deals with challenge and failure, which is sure to be a useful life skill she will need in the real world, starting with her four years in college."*

**Sample #5: Just Keep Folding—Jodie**

Having explored the myths from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, my curiosity was piqued in eighth grade by a simple legend from Japanese lore. If you fold one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant you one wish. I took it as a challenge. My previous forays into origami had ended poorly, but I was so excited to begin my quest that this detail seemed inconsequential. My art teacher loaned me a piece of origami paper and, armed with an online tutorial, my quest began. Like an early prototype of the airplane, I ascended towards my dreams for a glorious moment before nose-diving into the ground. The first crane was a disastrous failure of wrinkly lines and torn paper. Too embarrassed to ask for another, I turned to my stack of Post-it notes. By the third attempt, I ended up with a sticky pink paper crane. Holding that delicate bird, I was flooded with triumph and elation.

The first two hundred cranes were all crafted from Post-it notes. Armed with a pack of highlighters, I decorated each piece of paper individually. I folded cranes at home, between classes, and in the car. My fingers were permanently sticky from the glue I scraped off every square. Slowly, my collection grew: first ten, then fifty, then one hundred. Before the task could become monotonous, I started experimenting. How small was it possible for a crane to be? Smaller than a golf ball? Smaller than a dime? Small enough to sit on the end of a pencil? Any size was attainable. I could make a crane smaller than almost any arbitrary form of measurement. Soon I could finish a crane in fifty seconds or with my eyes closed. Anything square and foldable became my medium. Paper towels, candy wrappers, and aluminum foil joined my vibrant menagerie of carefully folded paper. I was unstoppable; that wish was as good as mine.

By six hundred cranes, the increasing demands of high school academics caused my pace to slow. I despaired. I wouldn't let this be another ambitious project that I couldn't finish.

My cranes mattered to me. As an outlet for expression, they served as a way to defuse frustration and sadness,

and a source of pride and joy. Their creation allows me to bring beauty to the world and to find a sense of order in the bustle and chaos of life. There is a lot of beauty to be found in tiny things. I'm reminded that little gestures have a lot of meaning. I have given away cranes to my friends as a pick-me-up on bad days, and I have made cranes to commemorate people, such as the dark green crane I made the day my grandmother died. They are a symbol of hope to remind me what I have accomplished.

So, I pushed myself to keep working and to keep folding one crane at a time. My determination paid off, and in the summer after sophomore year, my passion was reinvigorated. One month before the end of junior year, I folded my thousandth paper crane. As I leaned over the open drawer brimming with origami pieces in a multitude of sizes and colors, I felt a rush of satisfaction and triumph. Not only was 1,000 cranes an achievement in its own right, but I proved to myself that I can finish what I start.

The world is filled with big numbers. College tuition, monthly rent, and car prices deal in the many thousands. Those figures are incomprehensible to someone who has never interacted with anything so large, and I wanted to understand them. A thousand will never simply be a number to me: it is hundreds upon hundreds of hand-folded cranes combined with years of effort.

So what did I wish for? It turns out, I didn't need the wish. I learned I have the power to make things happen for myself. (650 words)

**Commentary:**

**Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee:**

*"What was most impressive about Jodie's essay was not the accomplishment of making 1,000 paper cranes, but how much we were able to learn about her through this simple anecdote. We determined she is someone who perseveres, as seen through the personal growth that arrived from her initial failure and eventual completion of a goal on top of the demands of high school. We learned she is kind and caring—traits exemplified through sharing cranes with friends having bad days and those made to commemorate people she lost. Her essay also showed us she is curious and willing to experiment, like testing out how small she could make cranes. These characteristics stood out and gave us an idea of how Jodie will contribute to our community, which is important in a holistic process where we try to learn about the whole student."*

**Sample #6: From Yonkers to Accra—Ansley**

"Do you have body bags? The leak-proof kind...we need as many as you can spare!"

My shoulders slumped as the voice on the phone offered me camera bags instead. I was sixteen and had just returned from an infectious diseases course at Emory University, where my final presentation was on Ebola. Within weeks, the first infected American arrived at Emory for treatment. Our country panicked, while thousands lay dying in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, their last visions strangers in spacesuits. I ached for the people, especially the children, who were dying alone, and I needed to help. Drawing on my new knowledge of Ebola's pathology, I had an idea that I thought might work.

Ebola Kits. Rubber gloves, masks, and bleach, shrink-wrapped together inside a sturdy bucket, instructions in pictures to bridge the languages of Mende, French, Krio, Fula, and Susu. While the kits contained only the bare necessities, they would allow people to care for family and neighbors without inviting the spread of Ebola. Doing nothing was genocide, with generations of families disappearing overnight. The images haunted me, lifeless bodies in dirt, oblivious to the flies swarming around them, as everyone watched from a safe distance. I pitched my idea to The Afya Foundation, a global health NGO I have worked with since the 2010 Haiti earthquake. I was on a mission. Ebola kits in every village. Easy to assemble and ship. Potential to save thousands. While I received an enthusiastic response to my idea, Afya's team sent me on a different mission: obtaining body bags, the unfortunate reality of



people who were invisible in a world that waited far too long to see them.

I spent two weeks calling body bag suppliers after school. Treatment centers were desperate, wrapping bodies in garbage bags with duct tape and tossing them mindlessly into the ground. It was disrespectful, even inhumane, because West African burials include washing, touching, and kissing the bodies. Without these rituals, West Africans believe the spirit of the deceased can never be at peace. Culture and medicine were colliding head-on, and there was no easy solution. While Ebola made these rituals lethal, at least body bags allowed people to be safely buried and not treated like garbage. After many failed attempts, I reached a funeral home director who donated body bags from his own supply.

Public health is one of the most pressing and complex issues we face as a global society, and it is my passion. I am disturbed that not all lives are valued equally. I cannot accept the fact that children die from preventable diseases, simply because they are born in countries with less wealth and stability. In America, we are curing cancer with a mutated poliovirus strain, but we haven't eradicated polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We come together in crises, highly publicized earthquakes and tsunamis, but we haven't come together to solve the problem of basic human health, a right for every person on earth. Ensuring our health is complicated and daunting and requires the mass coordination of agencies and governments to build sustainable infrastructures with local citizens in charge. I want to be part of the solution and am engaging in public health in every way I can: in the field, in the classroom, and through global health charities.

From Yonkers to Accra, I have met the most amazing people from all walks of life, and I feel a deep and stirring sense of purpose in my global health work. I am empowered and proud of my contributions, but I also experience humility at a level that transforms me. I am blessed that I have found my passion, one that combines my intellectual curiosity, determination, and my moral compass. I am optimistic for the future and the journey that lies ahead, as I do everything in my power to make basic healthcare a reality for the world. (647 words)

**Commentary:**

**Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee:**

*"Ansley's interest in global health jumped out at us from the first sentence, and she carried this same theme through the entire essay. What her essay did particularly well, though, was show a clear path from passion to action. Rather than just talk about her interest in the field, we got the sense that she is motivated to take initiative and get engaged. Students at Johns Hopkins routinely display an entrepreneurial spirit in their pursuits, and Ansley demonstrated a similar approach in her fight to prevent additional outbreaks of Ebola in Africa."*

**Sample #7: My Dell Hid My Privilege and My Mac Hid My Financial Need (winner of *NYTimes* college essay contest)**

The most exciting part was the laptop.

My mom grabbed the thick envelope out of my hands and read off the amenities associated with the Tang Scholarship to Phillips Academy: full tuition for all four years, a free summer trip, \$20 a week for me to spend on all the Cheetos and nail polish my heart desired, and finally, a free laptop.

I had never had a computer of my own before, and to me the prospect symbolized a world of new possibilities. I was the only student from my public middle school I knew to ever go to an elite boarding school, and it felt like being invited into a selective club. My first week at Andover, dazed by its glamour and newness, I fought my way to the financial aid office to pick up the laptop; I sent my mom a photo of me grinning and clutching the cardboard box. Back in my dorm room, I pulled out my prize, a heavy but functional Dell, and marveled at its sleek edges, its astonishing speed.

But the love story of my laptop came clamoring to a halt. In the library, as I stumbled to negotiate a space to fit in, I watched my friends each pull out a MacBook. Each was paper-thin and seemingly weightless. And mine, heavy enough to hurt my back and constantly sighing like a tired dog, was distinctly out of place. My laptop, which I had thought was my ticket to the elite world of Andover, actually gave me away as the outsider I was.

For a long time, this was the crux of my Andover experience: always an outsider. When I hung out with wealthier friends, I was disoriented by how different their lives were from mine. While they spent summers in Prague or Paris, I spent mine mining the constellation of thrift stores around New Haven. The gap between full-scholarship and full-pay felt insurmountable.

But I also felt like an outsider going to meetings for the full-scholarship affinity group. My parents attended college and grew up wealthier than I did, giving me cultural capital many of my full-scholarship friends never had access to. Moreover, I'm white and could afford occasional concert tickets or sparkly earrings. The laptop, carried by all full-scholarship students and coded with hidden meanings, pivoted my friends' understandings of me. At home, I grew up middle class, then became the privileged prep school girl. But at Andover, suddenly, I was poor. Trying to reconcile these conflicting identities, I realized how complex and mutable class is. My class is connected to my parents' income, but it's also rooted in cultural knowledge and objects that are charged with greater meaning.

Which brings me back to the laptop: in the middle of my senior fall, my exhausted Dell broke and I couldn't afford another. When I managed to borrow a slim Mac from my school, I felt the walls around me reorient. I hoped that now I wouldn't have to think about the electric web of privilege and power every time I sent an email. Instead, I felt a new anxiety: I worried when I sat in the magnificent dining hall with my beautiful computer that I had lost an important part of my identity.

When I started at Andover, these constant dueling tensions felt like a trap: like I would never be comfortable anywhere. (The school sensed it too, and all full-financial aid students now receive MacBooks.) But maybe it's the opposite of a trap. Maybe I'm culturally ambidextrous, as comfortable introducing a speaker on the stage of Andover's century-old chapel as getting my nose pierced in a tattoo parlor in New Haven. My hyperawareness of how my Dell hid my privilege and how my Mac hid my financial need pushed me to be aware of what complicated stories were hiding behind my classmates' seemingly simple facades. I am a full-scholarship student who benefits from cultural, socioeconomic and racial privilege: my story isn't easy, but it's still mine. (666 Words)

### College Recommendations

**You will probably need two college recommendations when applying to colleges. Most students ask a teacher to serve as at least one of their recommenders. It is important for you to keep the following in mind:**

- Your teachers complete college recommendations in addition to the work they already do. Sometimes, they may not be able to commit to writing your recommendation. Other times, they may need lots of time to do so. Remember this. Ask your teacher(s) early and be respectful of their time and don't be upset if they say they won't be able to write a recommendation your behalf.
- Your teachers will need, at least, a detailed resume and a copy of your transcript. Other teachers may require more from you. If and when you ask a teacher to write a recommendation on your behalf, have these documents ready. The more information they have about you, the more personalized your recommendation can be.
- You should put your recommendation request in writing. An email or a short letter explaining why you'd like this teacher/person to write your recommendation is helpful. Think: why, of all people, would you like this person to write on your behalf?
- You should follow any favor such as this one up with a thank you note. That is good practice in general.

## Student Resumes

Your college application will require a student resume. This is important for your college recommendation requests as well as any jobs, internships, or programs to which you apply. It is a good idea to have an updated resume at all times. Please utilize the following guidelines and sample to work on your resume this summer.

- Resumes should not exceed one side of one 8.5x11 sheet of paper.
- They should be professional, neat, and easy on the eye. (Not too busy!)
- They should not include accomplishments from middle school; stick to high school only.
- If your resume is a little bare, utilize this summer to participate in activities and programs you can add to your resume.
- Utilize the list of "Resume action words" at the end of this packet when creating your resume.

# **Erica Lucas**

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Elmhurst, N.Y. 11373  
(718) 555-9826  
Erica.lucas@gmail.com

## **Education**

**Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics (MCSM), New York, NY** Class of 2018

**GPA:** 92.67%

**Advanced Placement Courses:** Statistics, World History, English Language and Composition

## **Awards and Recognition**

- National Honor Society
- Principal's Honor Roll: 2016, 2017
- Second Place, MCSM Poetry Slam, April 2016

## **Work Experience**

**Brooklyn Arts Museum** Facilitator Feb. 2017-June 2017

- Worked with other high school students studying relationship between performing arts and criticism
- Attended Next Wave Festival performances at Brooklyn Arts Museum
- Met with professional artists and writers who guided our workshops

## **Leadership and Volunteer Activities**

**National Honor Society** Scholar May 2017-present

- Coordinate special activities at school
- Participate in community service activities outside of school
- Participated in freshman orientation and parent-teacher conferences at Manhattan Center

**Planned Parenthood** Volunteer Sept. 2016-Present

- Work in office organizing files and patient forms
- Address patient concerns and questions, both in person and on the phone
- Facilitate workshops on reproductive and sexual health for interested young teenagers

**Varsity Tennis, MCSM** Team Member Sept. 2015-Present

- Captain as of April 2013
- Assist in running practices
- Organize and implement team building activities

## **Skills**

- Proficient in Microsoft Office
- Proficient in iMovie, Java
- Fluent in Swedish, versed in Spanish

**Management/  
Leadership  
Skills**

administered  
analyzed  
appointed  
approved  
assigned  
attained  
authorized  
chaired  
considered  
consolidated  
contracted  
controlled  
converted  
coordinated  
decided  
delegated  
developed  
directed  
eliminated  
emphasized  
enforced  
enhanced  
established  
executed  
generated  
handled  
headed  
hired  
hosted  
improved  
incorporated  
increased  
initiated  
inspected  
instituted  
led  
managed  
merged  
motivated  
organized  
originated  
overhauled  
oversaw  
planned  
presided  
prioritized  
produced  
recommended  
reorganized  
replaced  
restored  
reviewed  
scheduled  
streamlined  
strengthened  
supervised  
terminated

**Communication/  
People Skills**

addressed  
advertised  
arbitrated  
arranged  
articulated  
authored

clarified  
collaborated  
communicated  
composed  
condensed  
conferred  
consulted  
contacted  
conveyed  
convinced  
corresponded  
debated  
defined  
described  
developed  
directed  
discussed  
drafted  
edited  
elicited  
enlisted  
explained  
expressed  
formulated  
furnished  
incorporated  
influenced  
interacted  
interpreted  
interviewed  
involved  
joined  
judged  
lectured  
listened  
marketed  
mediated  
moderated  
negotiated  
observed  
outlined  
participated  
persuaded  
presented  
promoted  
proposed  
publicized  
reconciled  
recruited  
referred  
reinforced  
reported  
resolved  
responded  
solicited  
specified  
spoke  
suggested  
summarized  
synthesized  
translated  
wrote

**Research  
Skills**

analyzed  
clarified

collected  
compared  
conducted  
critiqued  
detected  
determined  
diagnosed  
evaluated  
examined  
experimented  
explored  
extracted  
formulated  
gathered  
identified  
inspected  
interpreted  
interviewed  
invented  
investigated  
located  
measured  
organized  
researched  
searched  
solved  
summarized  
surveyed  
systematized  
tested

**Technical  
Skills**

adapted  
assembled  
built  
calculated  
computed  
conserved  
constructed  
converted  
debugged  
designed  
determined  
developed  
engineered  
fabricated  
fortified  
installed  
maintained  
operated  
overhauled  
printed  
programmed  
rectified  
regulated  
remodeled  
repaired  
replaced  
restored  
solved  
specialized  
standardized  
studied  
upgraded  
utilized

**Teaching  
Skills**

adapted  
advised  
clarified  
coached  
communicated  
conducted  
coordinated  
critiqued  
developed  
enabled  
encouraged  
evaluated  
explained  
facilitated  
focused  
guided  
individualized  
informed  
instilled  
instructed  
motivated  
persuaded  
set goals  
simulated  
stimulated  
taught  
tested  
trained  
transmitted  
tutored

**Financial/  
Data Skills**

administered  
adjusted  
allocated  
analyzed  
appraised  
assessed  
audited  
balanced  
calculated  
computed  
conserved  
corrected  
determined  
developed  
estimated  
forecasted  
managed  
marketed  
measured  
planned  
programmed  
projected  
reconciled  
reduced  
researched  
retrieved

**Creative Skills**

acted  
adapted  
began  
combined  
conceptualized

condensed  
created  
customized  
designed  
developed  
directed  
displayed  
drew  
entertained  
established  
fashioned  
formulated  
founded  
illustrated  
initiated  
instituted  
integrated  
introduced  
invented  
modeled  
modified  
originated  
performed  
photographed  
planned  
revised  
revitalized  
shaped  
solved

**Helping skills**

adapted  
advocated  
aided  
answered  
arranged  
assessed  
assisted  
cared for  
clarified  
coached  
collaborated  
contributed  
cooperated  
counseled  
demonstrated  
diagnosed  
educated  
encouraged  
ensured  
expedited  
facilitated  
familiarize  
furthered  
guided  
helped  
insured  
intervened  
motivated  
provided  
referred  
rehabilitated  
resented  
resolved  
simplified  
supplied  
supported  
volunteered

**Organization/  
Detail Skills**

approved  
arranged  
cataloged  
categorized  
charted  
classified  
coded  
collected  
compiled  
corresponded  
distributed  
executed  
filed  
generated  
implemented  
incorporated  
inspected  
logged  
maintained  
monitored  
obtained  
operated  
ordered  
organized  
prepared  
processed  
provided  
purchased  
recorded  
registered  
reserved  
responded  
reviewed  
routed  
scheduled  
screened  
set up  
submitted  
supplied  
standardized  
systematized  
updated  
validated  
verified

**Other**

achieved  
completed  
expanded  
exceeded  
improved  
pioneered  
reduced  
(losses)  
resolved  
(issues)  
restored  
spearheaded  
succeeded  
surpassed  
transformed  
won

