

ANALYZING THE ESSAYS

1. **Discovering Resilience: My Journey of Growth from a Mission Trip to Haiti (Exemplary)**

Purpose: 8 points, Masterful.

This essay shapes the main idea with a clear approach/focus: The writer’s experience helping Haitian people in need taught the writer about deeper values.

Development: 8 points, Masterful.

This essay has a fairly clear focus on scene. It is unified but does not have enough detail, especially about the writer’s growth and how this trip specifically helped with that. (E.g., a specific story that Jean told the writer and its effect on them, and the writer’s evening reflections with the team—what exactly did this writer struggle with back home?)

Persona: 8 points, Masterful.

The tone is somewhat clear, and some details about the writer make a case for them potentially being a good addition to an academic community (e.g., helping after the flood, becoming more resilient and grateful). However, it is called a mission trip, but religion is not mentioned at all; that was a little confusing.

Language Use: 7 points, Progressing.

Although this essay appeals to all the senses, both the use of a few too many clichés and sometimes a lack of specificity occasionally weaken the writing. For instance, “the warm sun kissed my face” when they are still on the plane; “simplicity of their lives”—give examples: No electronic games to play? Shorter school day? No school at all? How do they get their food and water?

Organization: 4.5 points, Masterful.

The essay moves from the plane ride, to arrival, to getting to know some locals, bonding with the team, through a crisis, departure, and ends with a reflection that wraps it up well.

Conventions: 5 points. Grammatical rules followed; no citations, but formatting is clear and follows MLA style.

TOTAL SCORE: 40.5/50 points = 81%

2. **My Big Dream: A Letter to College Admissions (Progressing)**

Purpose: 7 points, Progressing.

This essay’s main idea seems to be that the writer aspires to be a professional football player, and his dad inspired him to persevere. The approach to the main idea is a little overused (moment of triumph followed by general reflection).

Development: 7 points, Progressing.

The essay starts with a clear scene, on a football field at the end of a game, mentions inspirations, and ends with hope for the future, but there are not enough details to help the

reader connect with the writer (e.g., specifics about this writer’s heroes, what sacrifices the writer’s father made, what kind of work he did, the hard work the writer had put in practicing football).

Persona: 7 points, Progressing.

The individual behind the story does not come through to the reader. The essay feels too “pat.” E.g., the writer says they have a big heart; why should we believe them? The writer should give specific examples to show, not tell.

Language Use: 5, Not at Standard.

The essay’s language is clear but uses too many clichés: “the crowd roared,” “I want to make a difference”—how, exactly? “He worked long hours to provide for our family”—what kind of work did he do and what did he give up for his family? “I can achieve anything I set my mind to”—if it’s becoming a professional football player, how does the writer plan to achieve that?

Organization: 3 points, Not at Standard.

Writer’s triumph on the football field is somewhat connected to his inspirations (famous footballers, hardworking dad), but the transitions between the topics are not at all clear.

Conventions: 4 points, Masterful.

No grammatical errors, MLA formatting followed.

TOTAL SCORE: 33/50 points = 66%

3. Leading the March: My Journey as a Drum Major (Exemplary)

Purpose: 8 points, Masterful.

This essay’s main idea is how becoming a drum major taught this writer about leadership. The approach to the topic and its framing is clear.

Development: 8 points, Masterful.

The essay has a clear focus on the scene: it starts on a football field with the writer raising the baton and ends on the same football field with the writer lowering the baton. It also makes it easy to understand the link between working to become a good drum major and learning how to be a good leader. It could use some more detail, e.g., how exactly did this writer support their bandmates? Give at least one example.

Persona: 8 points, Masterful.

The essay’s tone is somewhat clear, although it can be hard to get a sense of the individual writing this story. However, the writer as presented is a good potential addition to an academic community.

Language Use: 8 points, Masterful.

The writer’s powerful word choices make for a great opening paragraph that engages the reader’s senses, gives lots of detail, and sets the scene. Still, there are some clichés further on: “It’s about connecting with people”—how did the writer do that? “United by our love for music”—show, don’t tell this; perhaps describing a rehearsal scene.

Organization: 4.5 points, Exemplary.

The events are clearly connected to the idea (growth as a leader), transitioning logically from the opening scene to the beginning of the writer’s journey as a freshman, the development of their ambition, how they worked for their goal, achieving the goal, learning how to lead a team, then back to the scene where they started (on the field), and a wrap-up reflection as the music ends, looking back at the experience and linking it to the writer’s hopes for the future.

Conventions: 5 points, Exemplary. No grammatical or formatting errors.

TOTAL SCORE: 41.5/50 points = 83%

4. My Journey: From Chess to Culinary Dreams (Exemplary)

Purpose: 8 points, Masterful.

This essay sustains a clear focus on the writer’s love for the culinary arts and tries to shape that idea, but the mention of chess is not really aligned with that focus. It’s not at all clear how chess and cooking are linked in this writer’s life.

Development: 8 points, Masterful.

The essay is clearly focused on a summary (how the writer developed a desire for a career as a chef) and it’s mostly easy to understand, but could use a bit more detail (e.g., specific creation by Chef Mia—maybe one that the writer tried to recreate, perhaps unsuccessfully at first?; specific recipe they made with their grandma and her reaction and the memories it evoked, perhaps linking smell to memory).

Persona: 8 points, Masterful.

The tone is somewhat clear, but the writer could make the personal experience and outlook more obvious/easy to see. More detail and specificity would help with this.

Language Use: 8 points, Masterful.

The writer uses thesaurus words like “impactful,” “evoke,” and “plethora,” but there are a couple of clichés (“nothing short of spectacular,” “no dream is too big to pursue”) and overblown language (three instances of “amazing/amaze”). The essay also strikes a tone that might be a little too casual/personal (beginning with “Hi there!” and ending with “Warm regards”).

Organization: 3.8 points, Progressing.

The reference to the animated movie *Ratatouille* comes too late in the essay to make a real impact and seems irrelevant by the time the reader gets to it. Moving it up nearer the beginning would position it as a source of inspiration from the author's childhood. Another major issue is the lack of a connection between chess and cooking; there is no real transition or linkage from one to the other.

Conventions: 3.8 points, Progressing.

The movie title should have been italicized rather than put in quotation marks. No grammatical errors.

TOTAL SCORE: 39.6/50 points = 79%

5. My Family is My Strength: My Journey to Pursuing Biochemical Engineering (Progressing)

Purpose: 6 points, Not at Standard.

The main idea *may* be how the writer's family supports them, but the essay frequently veers off topic and it's not clear *how* their family supports them, or what the link is between that support and the very specific topic of biochemical engineering.

Development: 7 points, Progressing.

The essay is not focused on either a particular scene or a particular summary. The reader can understand it, but the narrative is not well developed and lacks detail and specificity. For instance, why did the writer's parents believe that education is the key to unlocking a better future? Were there lost opportunities? More details about their backgrounds would help. Expanding the section in the middle ("Now, as I look ahead to my future...") can link it more closely with the theme of a family encouraging education. Maybe use the angle of engineering your life like you would engineer chemicals, or the way biology can transform one chemical into another, to improve people's lives?

Persona: 7 points, Progressing.

The essay's tone contains some discrepancies: The parts about the writer's family struggles and their parents' divorce sound like one person (slightly immature/struggling) and the paragraph about looking ahead to the future sound like another person (ambitious wannabe scientist). The tone can also be a little too informal ("Hi there!" "Warm regards").

Language Use: 6 points, Not at Standard.

The essay uses too many clichés ("you can do anything you set your mind to," "just remember to stay true to yourself and never give up," "maybe, just maybe, I can make a difference," "hold onto your dreams," "We're all capable of greatness"). The writer sometimes resorts to simplistic language ("it was tough," "thank you for listening to [should be "reading"] my story").

The writer does not use dialogue effectively (see clichés listed above; this is not how people actually talk). The essay seems to take a cookie-cutter approach to language use.

Organization: 3.5 points, Progressing.

The structure of this essay has some connections between ideas (family support for education) and events (dinner table conversation), but the transitions need work. If we are told early on that the parents are divorced, how come they are both talking to the writer around the dinner table later? How does the writer live with both parents if they are not together anymore? Does the writer move between houses? It might be a good idea to specify the age the writer was when their parents split up, to clarify how much time they had together. Also, the connection between the writer's family's support for education in general and the writer's interest in biochemical engineering in particular is nonexistent. The essay feels disjointed.

Conventions: 3.5 points, Progressing.

The writer shows control of grammatical rules, but the essay lacks sentence variety.

TOTAL SCORE: 33/50 points = 66%

The Crimson. (2023). 10 Successful Harvard Application Essays | 2023. <https://www.thecrimson.com/topic/sponsored-successful-harvard-essays-2023/>