

The Essence Objects Exercise

How it works: I'll explain in the workshop.

For a video version of this exercise (if you want to repeat it), go here:

www.collegeessayguy.com/guide-objects-exercise



The Values Exercise

How it works: Place a check mark beside your Top 10 values.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> community | <input type="checkbox"/> expertise | <input type="checkbox"/> competence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inspiration | <input type="checkbox"/> order | <input type="checkbox"/> practicality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> money | <input type="checkbox"/> privacy | <input type="checkbox"/> creativity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> intellectual | <input type="checkbox"/> self expression | <input type="checkbox"/> excitement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> status | <input type="checkbox"/> stability | <input type="checkbox"/> collaboration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> financial gain | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> social change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> laughter | <input type="checkbox"/> autonomy | <input type="checkbox"/> beauty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> serenity | <input type="checkbox"/> risk | <input type="checkbox"/> ecological awareness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical challenge | <input type="checkbox"/> balance | <input type="checkbox"/> quality relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> self-discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> travel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> competition | <input type="checkbox"/> courage | <input type="checkbox"/> decisiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> career | <input type="checkbox"/> family | <input type="checkbox"/> curiosity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fame | <input type="checkbox"/> empathy | <input type="checkbox"/> spirituality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> working with others | <input type="checkbox"/> working alone | <input type="checkbox"/> loyalty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> humility | <input type="checkbox"/> honesty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> security | <input type="checkbox"/> efficiency | <input type="checkbox"/> independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> strength | <input type="checkbox"/> intensity | <input type="checkbox"/> supervising others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> self-control | <input type="checkbox"/> health and fitness | <input type="checkbox"/> recognition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hunger | <input type="checkbox"/> meaningful work | <input type="checkbox"/> accountability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> personal development | <input type="checkbox"/> my country | <input type="checkbox"/> democracy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> trust | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> close relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> faith | <input type="checkbox"/> truth | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> resourcefulness | <input type="checkbox"/> respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> challenges | <input type="checkbox"/> bravery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> vulnerability | <input type="checkbox"/> commitment | <input type="checkbox"/> communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> change and variety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friendship | <input type="checkbox"/> helping others | <input type="checkbox"/> compassion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellence | <input type="checkbox"/> influence | <input type="checkbox"/> nature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> job tranquility | <input type="checkbox"/> wit | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> power | <input type="checkbox"/> success | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> passion | <input type="checkbox"/> patience | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cooperation | <input type="checkbox"/> listening | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> affection | <input type="checkbox"/> diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wisdom | <input type="checkbox"/> love | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> fast-paced work | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> growth | <input type="checkbox"/> nutrition | |



THE "FEELINGS AND NEEDS" EXERCISE

Adapted from an exercise created by Nonviolent Communication Expert LaShelle Lowe-Chardé (<http://www.wiseheartpdx.org>).

When I saw/heard/experienced... _____
(What event, positive or negative, did you experience?)

I felt... _____
(Choose 2-3 emotions from the list below)

Because I needed... _____
(Choose 2-3 needs from the list below)

FEELINGS

Delighted

Joyful
Happy
Amused
Adventurous
Blissful
Elated

Thankful

Appreciative
Moved
Touched
Tender
Expansive
Grateful

Excited

Enthusiastic
Overjoyed
Fervent
Giddy
Eager
Ecstatic
Thrilled

Satisfied

Fulfilled
Gratified

Interested

Curious
Absorbed

Healthy

Empowered
Alive
Robust

Relaxed

Relieved
Rested
Mellow
At ease
Light

Content

Cheerful
Glad
Comfortable
Pleased

Friendly

Affectionate
Loving
Passionate

Energetic

Exhilarated
Exuberant
Vigorous

Alert

Focused
Awake
Clearheaded

Peaceful

Tranquil
Serene
Calm

Confident

Secure
Safe
Hopeful

Scared

Apprehensive
Dread
Worried
Panicky
Frightened
Vulnerable

Nervous

Jittery
Anxious
Restless
Vulnerable

Tense

Cranky
Stiff
Stressed
Overwhelmed
Agitated
Aggravated

Hurt

Pain
Agony
Anguish
Heartbroken
Lonely

Depressed

Disconnected
Detached
Despondent
Dejected
Bored

Tired

Burnt Out
Exhausted
Lethargic

Angry

Furious
Rage
Irate
Resentful
Irritated

Frustrated

Disappointed
Discouraged
Disheartened
Impatient

Shocked

Disturbed
Stunned
Alarmed
Appalled
Concerned
Horrified

Sad

Grief
Despair
Gloomy
Sullen
Downhearted
Hopeless

Torn

Ambivalent
Confused
Puzzled

Jealous

Envious
Bitter

Embarrassed

Ashamed
Contrite
Guilty

NEEDS

Intimacy

Empathy
Connection
Affection
Warmth
Love
Understanding
Acceptance
Caring
Bonding
Compassion
Communion
Divine Union
Sexuality

Autonomy

Choice
Freedom
Spontaneity
Independence
Respect
Honor

Security

Predictability
Consistency
Stability
Trust
Reassurance

Partnership

Mutuality
Friendship
Companionship
Support
Collaboration
Belonging
Community
Consideration
Seen/heard
Appreciation

Purpose

Competence
Contribution
Efficiency
Growth
Learning
Challenge
Discovery

Order

Structure
Clarity
Focus
Information

Celebration

Mourning
Aliveness
Humor
Beauty
Play
Creativity
Joy

Honesty

Integrity
Authenticity
Wholeness
Fairness

Peace

Groundedness
Hope



FEELINGS AND NEEDS WORKSHEET



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How do I begin to write my personal statement?

A: My two favorite exercises are called the “Essence Objects” and “Values” exercises. We’ll begin both today in our workshop. You can also take a look at the prompts on the next page.

Q: How long should my essay be?

A: It depends on the essay. Your personal statement can be up to 650 words, the UC personal insight questions are 350 words each, and other supplemental essays vary.

Q: How many essays will I need to write?

A: Probably around 10-15. These include the Common App main statement, the four UC Personal Insight Questions, plus supplements, which number anywhere from 1-5 additional essays per school.

Q: What are college admissions officers looking for?

A: They’re looking for the answers to these three questions:

- 1.) Core values
- 2.) Insight (aka insight or “so what” moments)
- 3.) Vulnerability (in other words: is it personal?)

Q: How do college admissions officers evaluate my essay?

A: Each school has its own criteria and different readers will prefer different elements. Michael Gulotta, Associate Director of Admissions at American University, for example, has told me he most looks to the essay to assess a student's writing ability. But Rick Diaz (Regional Director of Undergraduate Admission at SMU) is less interested in writing ability and more interested in a student's story.

Q: So which is more important: your story or your writing skill?

A: Both are important. "A good story, well told." That's your goal.

Q: What should my essay be about?

A: In a word, you.

Q: How do I structure my essay?

A: We'll discuss two options today: Montage Structure and Narrative Structure.

Q: How much do essays matter?

A: It depends on the college, but generally between 10%-30%. Essays tend to matter more for small schools, or schools who look at applications holistically. They matter most when it comes to differentiating you from students with similar academic profiles (grades, test scores, extracurriculars).

Q: If my grades are bad, can I get into Harvard with a great essay?

A: Nope. Schools look at your GPA, course rigor and test scores more than anything. When you're being compared to other students with similar GPA/SAT scores, that's when the essays can make or break your chances. But there are lots of other great schools besides Harvard. For a list of Colleges That Change Lives, Google "Colleges That Change Lives."

Q: Can a bad college essay negatively affect my application?

A: Yes.



COMMON APP PROMPTS

For private schools in 2019-2020. Choose one prompt. 650 words, strict limit.

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.
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?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
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.
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
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?
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.

THE UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

For the Univ. of California schools. Choose four prompts. 350 words, strict limit

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.
2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.
3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.
5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?
6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?



FOUR TYPES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

A

Student **has** faced significant challenges and **knows** what they want to study (and chooses to name both in their essay).

B

Student **has not** faced significant challenges (or doesn't want to put them in the essay), and **does know** what they want to study (and does want to put them in the essay).

C

Student **has** faced significant challenges (or doesn't want to put them in the essay), but **does not know** what s/he wants to study (or chooses not to name both in their essay).

D

Student **has not** faced significant challenges and **does not know** what s/he wants to study (or chooses not to name either in the essay).

A few notes on how to use this document:

I believe a good college essay should either:

- 1.) go **deep**, discussing one moment that fundamentally changed your life, or
- 2.) go **wide**, discussing many different elements of your life.

Narrative Structure will help you go **deep**.

Montage Structure will help you go **wide**.

Note before we begin: I don't believe people can generally be reduced to "types." So if it pains you to think of yourself as a "type" of student, just think of these as different types of strategies.

It's also important to note that these categories are fluid and it's possible to move from one to another. A student who has faced significant challenges but doesn't know what s/he wants to study (Category C), for example, may discover, through a process of research or counseling, what s/he would like to study and so move to Category A. Similarly, a student who has not faced significant challenges and does not know what s/he wants to study (Category D) may discover, through self-reflection or counseling, that s/he has indeed faced significant challenges, and so move to Category C. I recommend reading all the examples; you never know what might resonate.

Finally: There is no surefire approach for essay writing. No essay will, on its own, get a student into a college. Many different students are accepted to colleges each year with many different types of essays. Having said that, the task of the college essay is to shape the student's life into a coherent narrative. What follows are some strategies that have helped some of my students do just that.

Let's take a look at two different types of structure:



Narrative Structure

Here's the structure that most American films use. Learning this may change the way you watch films (it did for me). It's a structure as old as time and storytellers have been using it for thousands of years. Joseph Campbell called it the monomyth or Hero's Journey. I'll refer to as narrative structure. Its basic elements are:

1. **Status Quo**
2. **Inciting Incident / Status Quo Change**
3. **Raise the stakes**
4. **Moment of Truth**
5. **Outcome / New Status Quo**

Status Quo

Life as is. The hero, our main character, is living his/her normal life.

Inciting Incident / Status Quo Change

One day, something happens. A boy discovers he is a wizard (Harry Potter). A girl falls down a rabbit hole (Alice in Wonderland). You get the idea. In short, the hero is called to adventure.

Raising the Stakes

- * Things get more dangerous and important.
- * In small dramas, the events become more important inwardly, to our main characters' personal lives, threatening to change them forever.
- * In action movies, events become more important outwardly, escalating until not only our characters' lives are threatened, but the country, the world, then (in big budget films) Civilization as We Know It.
- * In some films, the character's inward journey (what s/he must learn) and outward journey (what s/he must do) are intertwined. See: Star Wars, Avatar, The Dark Knight.

Moment of Truth

The climax. The moment of highest tension. The character must make the Ultimate Choice or fight the Ultimate Battle.

- * Will Beauty kiss the Beast and save his life? (Beauty and the Beast)
- * Will Neo realize—and accept—his role as The One before it's too late? (The Matrix)
- * Will Frodo destroy the Ring and save Middle Earth? (Lord of the Rings)

Outcome / New Status Quo

The result.

Montage Structure

What is a montage?

Montage is a technique that involves creating a new whole from separate fragments (pictures, words, music, etc.). In filmmaking, the montage effect is used to condense space and time so that information can be delivered in a more efficient way.

Take the classic "falling in love" montage, commonly used in romantic comedies. We don't see every single interaction; instead, we see: he surprises her at work with flowers, they walk through the park, they dance in the rain, they pass an engagement ring store and she eyes a particular ring. You get the idea.

A few images tell the whole story. And you can use this technique for your essay.

But which essences should you choose? That's up to you. (It's art, remember, not science.)



"WITH DEBATE" ESSAY (TYPE A)

Written using the **Narrative Structure** for the **Common App** by a student who **has** faced significant challenges and **did know** what she wanted to study (and chose to name both in the essay)

The clock was remarkably slow as I sat, legs tightly crossed, squirming at my desk. "Just raise your hand," my mind pleaded, "ask." But despite my urgent need to visit the restroom, I remained seated, begging time to move faster. You see, I was that type of kid to eat French Fries dry because I couldn't confront the McDonalds cashier for some Heinz packets. I was also the type to sit crying in front of school instead of asking the office if it could check on my late ride. Essentially, I chose to struggle through a problem if the solution involved speaking out against it.

My diffidence was frustrating. My parents relied on me, the only one able to speak English, to guide them, and always anticipated the best from me. However, as calls for help grew, the more defunct I became. I felt that every move I made, it was a gamble between success and failure. For me, the fear of failure and disappointment far outweighed the possibility of triumph, so I took no action and chose to silently suffer under pressure.

Near meltdown, I knew something needed to be done. Mustering up the little courage I had, I sought ways to break out of my shell—without luck. Recreational art classes ended in three boring months. I gave up Self Defense after embarrassing myself in class. After-school band, library volunteering, and book clubs ended similarly. Continued effort yielded nothing.

Disillusioned and wrung dry of ideas, I followed my mom's advice and joined a debate club. As expected, the club only reaffirmed my self-doubt. Eye contact? Greater volume? No thanks.

But soon, the club moved on from "how to make a speech" lessons to the exploration of argumentation. We were taught to speak the language of Persuasion, and play the game of Debate. Eventually, I fell in love with it all.

By high school, I joined the school debate team, began socializing, and was even elected to head several clubs. I developed critical and analytical thinking skills, and learned how to think and speak spontaneously.

I became proud and confident. Moreover, I became eager to play my role in the family, and family relations strengthened. In fact, nowadays, my parents are interested in my school's newest gossip.

Four years with debate, and now I'm the kid up at the white board; the kid leading discussions; and the kid standing up for her beliefs.

More importantly, I now confront issues instead of avoiding them. It is exciting to discover solutions to problems that affect others, as I was able to do as part of the 1st Place team for the 2010 United Nations Global Debates Program on climate change and poverty. I take a natural interest in global issues, and plan to become a foreign affairs analyst or diplomat by studying international affairs with a focus on national identity.

In particular, I am interested in the North-South Korean tension. What irreconcilable differences have prompted a civilization to separate? Policy implications remain vague, and sovereignty theories have their limits—how do we determine what compromises are to be made? And on a personal level, why did my grandfather have to flee from his destroyed North Korean hometown--and why does it matter?

I see a reflection of myself in the divide at the 38th parallel because I see one part isolating itself in defense to outside threats, and another part coming out to face the world as one of the fastest- developing nations. Just as my shy persona before debate and extroverted character after debate are both part of who I am, the Korean civilization is also one. And just as my parents expect much from me, the first of my family to attend college, I have grand expectations for this field of study.

Length: 630 words



"ENDODONTICS" ESSAY (TYPE B)

Written using the **Montage Structure** for the **Common App** by a student who **had not** faced significant challenges (or chose not to name them in the essay) and **did know** what he wanted to study (and chose to name it in the essay)

As a kid I was always curious. I was unafraid to ask questions and didn't worry how dumb they would make me sound. In second grade I enrolled in a summer science program and built a solar-powered oven that baked real cookies. I remember obsessing over the smallest details: Should I paint the oven black to absorb more heat? What about its shape? A spherical shape would allow for more volume, but would it trap heat as well as conventional rectangular ovens? Even then I was obsessed with the details of design.

And it didn't stop in second grade.

A few years later I designed my first pair of shoes, working for hours to perfect each detail, including whether the laces should be mineral white or diamond white. Even then I sensed that minor differences in tonality could make a huge impact and that different colors could evoke different responses.

In high school I moved on to more advanced projects, teaching myself how to take apart, repair, and customize cell phones. Whether I was adjusting the flex cords that connect the IPS LCD to the iPhone motherboard, or replacing the vibrator motor, I loved discovering the many engineering feats Apple overcame in its efforts to combine form with function.

And once I obtained my driver's license, I began working on cars. Many nights you'll find me in the garage replacing standard chrome trim with an elegant piano black finish or changing the threads on the stitching of the seats to add a personal touch, as I believe a few small changes can transform a generic product into a personalized work of art.

My love of details applies to my schoolwork too.

I'm the math geek who marvels at the fundamental theorems of Calculus, or who sees beauty in $A=(s(s-a)(s-b)(s-c))^{1/2}$. Again, it's in the details: one bracket off or one digit missing and the whole equation collapses. And details are more than details, they can mean the difference between negative and positive infinity, an impossible range of solutions.

I also love sharing this appreciation with others and have taken it upon myself to personally eradicate mathonumophobiconfundosis, my Calculus teacher's term for "extreme fear of Math." A small group of other students and I have devoted our after-school time to tutoring our peers in everything from Pre-Algebra to AP Calculus B/C and I believe my fluency in Hebrew and Farsi has helped me connect with some of my school's Israeli and Iranian students. There's nothing better than seeing a student solve a difficult problem without me saying anything.

You probably think I want to be a designer. Or perhaps an engineer?

Wrong. Well, kind of.

Actually, I want to study Endodontics, which is (I'll save you the Wikipedia look-up) a branch of dentistry that deals with the tooth pulp and the tissues surrounding the root of a tooth. As an Endodontist, I'll be working to repair damaged teeth by performing precision root canals and implementing dental crowns. Sound exciting? It is to me.

The fact is, it's not unlike the work I've been doing repairing cellphone circuits and modifying cars, though there is one small difference. In the future I'll still be working to repair machines, but this machine is one of the most sophisticated machines ever created: the human body. Here, my obsession with details will be as crucial as ever. A one millimeter difference can mean the difference between a successful root canal and a lawsuit.

The question is: will the toothbrushes I hand out be mineral white or diamond white?

Length: 598 words



THE "BOWLING" ESSAY (TYPE C)

Written using the **Narrative Structure** for the **Common App** by a student who **had** faced significant challenges (and chose to name them in the essay) and **did not know** what he wanted to study (or chose not to name it in the essay)

Every weekend, my family and I go to the bowling alley. We either go to Lucky Strike in Orange County, to 300 in Pasadena or the AMF Bowladrome in Torrance. It's been a tradition for us ever since I turned 11. But here's a secret:

I've never bowled a game in my life.

I began going when I was 11 because that's when I was old enough to adroitly wipe down a table and spray Windex on a window without making a mess. Every Saturday night from 10pm to 4am, after entering the bowling alley through a back door, my parents dispatch my older sister Marlene and me to the lanes armed with broomsticks.

"Try to clean around the bowlers," she always says.

We always do.

In 2003 my family's stability was put to the test when my father suffered an accident: he was bitten by a horse and unable to work for three years. Some months later my year-old baby sister was hit by a car. My mother was our only financial support, so we often ate Cup of Noodles for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I prayed every night that things got better but first they got worse.

In the eleventh grade my father suffered a muscle failure and my mother was diagnosed with a tumor. Due to my parents' health problems I took on more responsibilities, sometimes missing school to care for my younger sisters and helping my father and mother at their work. Unfortunately, I pushed myself so hard that I ended up hurting myself, suffering a vain leakage in my brain. I was the fighter, the protector, and now I found myself needing someone to protect me. I was glad to have my mother by my side because she gave the strength I needed.

After some rest, I returned to school more focused than ever on preparing for my future. I got involved in Leadership Council where I'm now part of the civics committee, planning events such as Day at the Park and school dances. I've also become a big supporter of the Gay Straight Alliance that deals with anti-bullying, and through this club I've given presentations that address unfairness and promote equity. But perhaps my biggest support system has come through the four years on my high school soccer team, where my commitment and love for soccer won me the captain position for the past two years.

I know I'm not like many students my age, but I'm happy with who I am. I am the student who works on the weekends scrubbing restrooms, carrying trash bags and mopping kitchen floors. I am the student who won't give a second thought to missing a party to help my parents babysit my sisters or accompany them to a new job. I know that one day I will not take my family to a bowling alley to clean it but to enjoy it.

And who knows maybe one day I will learn to bowl.



THE "HOME" ESSAY (TYPE D)

Written using the **Montage Structure** for the **Common App** by a student who **had not** faced significant challenges and **did not know** what she wanted to study (or chose not to name either in the essay)

As I enter the double doors, the smell of freshly rolled biscuits hits me almost instantly. I trace the fan blades as they swing above me, emitting a low, repetitive hum resembling a faint melody. After bringing our usual order, the "Tailgate Special," to the table, my father begins discussing the recent performance of Apple stock with my mother, myself, and my older eleven year old sister. Bojangle's, a Southern establishment well known for its fried chicken and reliable fast food, is my family's Friday night restaurant, often accompanied by trips to Eva Perry, the nearby library. With one hand on my breaded chicken and another on *Nancy Drew: Mystery of Crocodile Island*, I can barely sit still as the thriller unfolds. They're imprisoned! Reptiles! Not the enemy's boat! As I delve into the narrative with a sip of sweet tea, I feel at home.

"Five, six, seven, eight!" As I shout the counts, nineteen dancers grab and begin to spin the tassels attached to their swords while walking heel-to-toe to the next formation of the classical Chinese sword dance. A glance at my notebook reveals a collection of worn pages covered with meticulously planned formations, counts, and movements. Through sharing videos of my performances with my relatives or discovering and choreographing the nuances of certain regional dances and their reflection on the region's distinct culture, I deepen my relationship with my parents, heritage, and community. When I step on stage, the hours I've spent choreographing, creating poses, teaching, and polishing are all worth it, and the stage becomes my home.

Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. This pulse mimics the beating of my heart, a subtle rhythm that persists each day I come into the lab. Whether I am working under the fume hood with platinum nanoparticles, manipulating raw integration data, or spraying a thin platinum film over pieces of copper, it is in Lab 304 in Hudson Hall that I first feel the distinct sensation, and I'm home. After several weeks attempting to synthesize platinum nanoparticles with a diameter between 10 and 16 nm, I finally achieve nanoparticles with a diameter of 14.6 nm after carefully monitoring the sulfuric acid bath. That unmistakable tingling sensation dances up my arm as I scribble into my notebook: I am overcome with a feeling of unbridled joy.

Styled in a t-shirt, shorts, and a worn, dark green lanyard, I sprint across the quad from the elective 'Speaking Arabic through the Rassias Method' to attend 'Knitting Nirvana'. This afternoon is just one of many at Governor's School East, where I have been transformed from a high school student into a philosopher, thinker, and avid learner. While I attend GS at Meredith College for Natural Science, the lessons learned and experiences gained extend far beyond physics concepts, serial dilutions, and toxicity. I learn to trust myself to have difficult yet necessary conversations about the political and economic climate. Governor's School breeds a culture of inclusivity and multidimensionality, and I am transformed from "girl who is hardworking" or "science girl" to someone who indulges in the sciences, debates about psychology and the economy, and loves to swing and salsa dance. As I form a slip knot and cast on, I'm at home.

My home is a dynamic and eclectic entity. Although I've lived in the same house in Cary, North Carolina for 10 years, I have found and carved homes and communities that are filled with and enriched by tradition, artists, researchers, and intellectuals. While I may not always live within a 5 mile radius of a Bojangle's or in close proximity to Lab 304, learning to become a more perceptive daughter and sister, to share the beauty of my heritage, and to take risks and redefine scientific and personal expectations will continue to impact my sense of home.



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