Assemble parts, check, work on the code, check. 3 more days to finish my solar powered power bank prototype and I wanted to make sure no time is wasted. I wanted to finish my prototype as fast as I could so that I can start moving on to another project. I’ve always had this over productive behaviour ever since high school. Avoiding the feeling of guilt when I'm not productive or doing something, I have a to-do list that helps me know what I need to do and do it efficiently. I always tried to fill in every time slot I had since my view was that I needed to be as efficient as productive as I could be.

However, the exact opposite happened when I was in Kei Island.  It was a 2-weeks trip with a non-profit organization called "DoctorShare' where I had made a set plan and schedule where I planned on making a plastic compressor to help reduce plastic waste there. But during my visit there, luck was not on my side. I got tested positive with the newly spread virus COVID-19. This tragedy made me frustrated because I couldn’t do what I had planned and had to miss a great opportunity in helping people. I felt very useless and unproductive since all I could do was just sit inside and rest, so I started finding things to do. I started working on my unfinished school thesis and homework. But after a day, I finished everything and ran out of things to do. What's left for me was to observe citizens surrounding me from afar.

However, while I was watching them, I started to realize that I wasn't just merely looking at them. My mind started coming up with observations and reflections. One crucial observation was that the problems they had were different from what I had expected. At first, I thought their main problem was the lack of tools and utility to preserve health, income, and environment. But then I had a conversation with one of the doctors there, she told me that the citizens had to bring a single plastic waste of any type to be examined. It turns out, more than half of the people who came didn’t bring anything and made-up excuses in order to still be treated. From this, I realized that their main problem was more on the lack of knowledge they had. This newly found knowledge made me realize how the project could be improved to better suit them, through focusing on teaching and providing them with the knowledge they need to care about their own problems. I hurriedly mention this to the person in charge and although we couldn’t straight away pivot and change our plans, I was surprised how I was able to gain new insights, despite being idle and indirectly involved. This trip made me realize that productivity and efficiency aren't just measured or merely based on doing all my to-do list. Taking time to observe, reflect, converse with people are also essential. They are meaningful experiences that are crucial to help develop projects and who I am as I can gain a different perspective that I might have missed if I didn't stop and pause for a while.

I went home from my 2 week trip and stumbled upon a to-do list I had made. “PS2 Prototype To-dos” written on the top of the paper with lines of tasks I had checked. For around 3 years, I have been working on a project named PS2 which stands for Powered Solar System where I intend to produce a solar powered power bank for daily usage. Learning from my trip to Kei Island, I allocated time for reflection and observation upon the project. I revisited each feature that I’ve designed or built. Looking at the precious prototype I had made, I reflect on the primary focus of making this product. At this moment, I realized that the product I’m making is needed more by people that lack electricity. I had made the best quality prototype I could have but didn't think about the affordability to people who actually need it. I finally decided to look for an alternative to the material used in order to make it more affordable to the people who need it the most.

Throughout my journey in understanding efficiency and productivity, I realized that the core of a successful plan doesn’t only involve being the utmost efficient and fast. The quality and impact, found mainly by observation and reflection upon a plan, needs to be factored in alongside, which is why a balance between efficiency and observation is needed in order to create the best quality and result. Everything in this life needs a balanced and efficient learning, a tiny revelation may have a large impact on society and bringing those solutions is what I intend to do in the future. The possibilities of improving are endless, so is my passion and energy to do so.

Dear Brandon:

It’s definitely not easy to be forced to take a step back from being productive, especially when we are so used to a certain pace. I’m glad you found a new perspective that contributed to your personal growth in the process!

I think you already have a solid structure and an overall great delivery. The last piece of the puzzle as you know is the word count. For this part, you can choose more concise wording where possible (I gave one suggestion above). Remove parts that are redundant and those you think do not serve in addressing the prompt. Go back to your outline and make sure each paragraph precisely conveys what you intend to.

Wonderful story and essay. All the best!

Thalia