**Consider your application as a whole. What do you personally want to emphasize about your application for the admission committee’s consideration? Highlight something that’s important to you or something you haven’t had a chance to share. Tell us, don’t show us (no websites please).** **(300 word maximum)\***

Growing up, I loved solving math riddles. I appreciated the fact that arithmetics had non-abstract, defined solutions. So when my friend invited me to a competitive programming club called Kokocoder, I was instantly interested. I believe it would allow me to pursue my passion for problem-solving from a computer science perspective. As I spent hours in the club learning, laughing, and enduring difficulties, the once-alien environment slowly turned into a place of comfort.

Through my journey at Kokocoder, I’ve encountered many people and been taught many lessons. However, I believe one of the biggest lessons I learned came from Vale, a senior member of the club. As a mentor to me, he was daring, innovative, and intelligent. Whenever I felt puzzled by one of the coding problems, he’d always tell me, “Start with the most ridiculous solution and see if it works. You can always optimize it later.” His outlook on solving problems encouraged me to become more creative and open-minded with different approaches. And as I continued progressing with this mindset, I realized that there was no wrong way of pursuing knowledge, no matter how random or stupid it may sound. This had a positive rippling effect on my growth in programming and even school studies.

My time at the club has made me more appreciative of the opportunities I had and grateful for the people around me as I expanded my social circle from late-night practice sessions to partaking in memorable events like camps and field trips. Being able to learn alongside other enthusiastic students has provided me with a competitive yet collaborative environment, enhancing my interpersonal skills.

The mindset I gained in Kokocoder will allow me to inch closer to my goal as a programmer as I continue to pursue knowledge at Carnegie Mellon and beyond.