**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)\***

During a summer break, I was enrolled in a competitive programming club from which I developed a new mindset.

As a beginner in competitive programming, simple sort and string matching algorithms were foreign to me and led to initial struggles in my study. I’d come up with irregular solutions to problems because of my lack of knowledge and only be met with failure. Not wanting to be ridiculed by my peers for my simple mistakes, I became hesitant in speaking out and asking questions which became detrimental to my progress. This only fueled my already low self-esteem at that time and made me question if I even belong in this club.

Vale showed me that I did. As a mentor to me, he was creative, knowledgeable and understanding. Whenever I felt puzzled by one of the coding problems, he’d always tell me, “Just think of any solution and try it. You can always optimize it later.” Every weekend as I go through codeforces problems with Vale, he’d encourage me to voice out my solutions no matter how ridiculous, explain my thought process and allow the environment to be conducive to debates. Slowly, I was improving both mentally and technically. His outlook in approaching problems encouraged me to be more daring and think more differently.

This created a rippling effect in my school studies. I became keen in pursuing outside sources through the internet and courses and not be confined by just my school’s textbook. I also became more active in class discussions, asking questions, clarifications and voicing out my opinions without fear of ridicule.

My time with Vale has taught me a valuable lesson: Don’t be afraid to look stupid and ask questions. Sometimes, the best answers start from the most ridiculous solutions and questions.

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