1. 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?

OR

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.

OR

1. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

I was on the edge. Every muscle fiber strained, pushing against the constant resistance of the rowing machine. Sweat trickled into my eyes, stinging, but I barely noticed. My heart pounded like a drum, a ceaseless rhythm echoing through my veins. The harsh rasp of my breath was almost drowned out by the electric surge of cheering around me, a distant roar. It fueled me. I inhaled the scent of iron, rubber, and determination. Adrenaline coursed through me, a wildfire, propelling me beyond fatigue. My vision started to waver, black dots creeping in. No, not yet, I told myself, one more stroke. Just one more. I wasn't just a rower, I was a warrior in a test of wills, pushing my limits. The pain was temporary, glory was forever. I ended up beating a NAVY SEAL and others with built physiques. The youngest, and the chubbiest kid won.

My lower back, an unwelcome adversary, screams out in protest as I strive to unlock my full potential. It's a physical hurdle that keeps you from crossing the finish line, a cruel reminder of the limitations imposed on you.

Yet, the mental battle within proves to be an even more formidable foe. Each day I stand on a battlefield of self-doubt, ensnared by the anxiety of judgment. The mirror reflects not just a person, but a swirl of perceived inadequacies, tainting my confidence and stirring an internal storm of overthinking.

There's a maddening dichotomy at play: a world of talent that draws praise and admiration, counterbalanced by the weight that shadows your every success, leaving a bitter aftertaste of 'what could have been.' This frustration of untapped potential - my life’s canvas half-painted - keeps me up at night, taunting you with the allure of the complete masterpiece that always feels just out of reach.

There, at the intersection of dreams and frustrations, I found my nemesis: my weight. It stood as the unseen barrier, a relentless tug holding you back from your full potential. Past attempts to conquer this foe were marked with fleeting victories, only to be followed by the inevitable slide back to square one.

My journey to self-awareness made me see that my weight was the main problem. It was like an anchor, pulling me down both physically and mentally. I carried 120 kilograms on a frame that was curved and bent, much like a shrimp. It wasn't surprising that I had back pain and struggled with basic physical tasks. I tried to fix my problems by visiting osteopaths, chiropractors, and physiotherapists, hoping they could ease my discomfort and help me stand a bit taller. But in the end, I understood that my weight and posture were slowing me down, and even though it was bearable, it was far from the life I wanted to live.

Coming to terms with the fact that my weight was the problem, I embarked on a dedicated journey toward weight loss. I dove into a regimen that included carefully rationing my food, meticulously counting calories, and consistently exercising at least five times a week. It was as if an eternal fire had been lit within me, burning with relentless passion and laser-focused on my goals. I would often picture a future where I was the proud owner of a healthy body, and the image was filled with immense positivity and a plethora of achievements. This dream fueled my motivation and I worked tirelessly, propelled by the conviction that I wouldn't stop until I obtained the life and body I wanted.

Despite my steadfast determination, I quickly learned that the path to weight loss was not as straightforward as I had initially anticipated. I hit numerous weight plateaus, faced a plethora of temptations, and experienced countless instances of self-imposed stress. There were moments when I was engulfed by a sense of hopelessness. Driven by the desire to transform into the best version of myself as swiftly as possible, each weight plateau felt like a colossal setback. In response, I would restrict my diet even further, eat increasingly less, and allow stress to cloud my mind as I desperately tried to figure out what was wrong and how to rectify it. However, in the midst of this struggle, a crucial realization dawned upon me: weight loss was not a sprint, but a marathon. I had been pushing my body to its extremes and subsisting on a bland, unappetizing diet, causing not only my weight but also my hair to thin out due to the harsh regimen.

This approach, I came to understand, was not healthy. But every failure became a stepping stone, every struggle a lesson in my journey. Armed with these insights, I reevaluated my plan and came back stronger. I devised a more balanced diet that was not only restrictive but also catered to my taste buds and cravings. Although it meant taking more time to see results, the payoff was evident in both my physical and mental health. I wasn't drained all the time, my cognitive functioning had significantly improved, and the results, albeit gradual, were visible and encouraging. More importantly, this new lifestyle was sustainable, allowing me to maintain it for the long haul, serving as a testament to my hard-earned wisdom and resilience. Throughout this battle, I have lost 30kg of burden.

The journey to weight loss was an embodiment of my mental resilience and physical endurance. It was a testament to my ability to conquer self-doubt, overcome challenges, and push through pain to achieve a goal. In the end, it was about more than just shedding kilograms. It was about self-discovery, personal growth, and the realization that when we set our minds to something, we truly are unstoppable.

Through this transformative journey, I've come to understand that life is fundamentally about habits, resilience, and consistency. My early morning runs and regular trips to the gym, along with the countless meals of bland, yet healthy food, weren't simply tasks; they were the cornerstones of my new lifestyle. The daily commitment, showing up no matter the circumstances, paved the way for a habit that has since become second nature. This new routine has not only enabled me to achieve my health goals, but it has also seeped into other aspects of my life, empowering me to accomplish more than I ever imagined. I've realized that intensity, while important, cannot replace consistency. It's through persistent efforts that we experience exponential growth. It's the steady dedication that fuels real, lasting change.