



committee more about your background or goals. Test scores only tell on part of your story, and we want to know more than just how *well* you work. We want to see *how* you actually think.

Below you'll find selected examples of essays that "worked," as nominated by our admissions committee. These entries are distinct and unique to the individual writer; however, each of them assisted the admissions reader in learning more about the student beyond the transcripts and lists of activities provided in their applications.

Hear from the Class of 2021

These selections represent just a few examples of essays we found impressive and helpful during the past admissions cycle. We hope these essays inspire you as you prepare to compose your own personal statements. The most important thing to remember is to be original and creative as you share your own story, thoughts, and ideas with us.

BENJAMIN

20 Questions

"Is it bigger than a breadbox?"

"Yes."

I have always been tall, decidedly tall. Yet, my curiosity has always surpassed my height. Starting at a young age, I would ask countless questions, from "How heavy is the Earth?" to "Where does rain come from?" My curiosity, displayed in questions like these, has truly defined me as a person and as a student. Therefore, it is not surprising that I became transfixed the first time I played 20Q (the electronic version of Twenty Questions). Somehow, a little spherical device guessed what I was thinking. The piece of technology sparked my curiosity and instilled in me a unique interest in 20Q. This interest would later reveal valuable character traits of mine while also paralleling various facets of my life.

"Does it strive to learn?"

"Yes."

I became determined to discover how 20Q guessed correctly. After some research, I discovered artificial intelligence, more specifically, artificial neural networks—systems which learn and improve themselves. This idea fascinated me. I wanted to learn more. I read avidly, seeking and absorbing as much information as I could. When given the opportunity years later, I signed up for the first computer programming class available to me. I found myself in an environment I loved. I would stay after class, go in during free periods, make my own apps, and work over Cloud-based IDEs. I prized the freedom and the possibilities.

"Is it driven?"

"Yes."

After my introduction to 20Q, I began to play Twenty Questions (the traditional parlor game) and became determined to rival the guessing accuracy of the artificial intelligence. At first I was mediocre. However, through long car rides with family, good-natured yet heated competitions with friends, logical strategy, and time, I became more effective. I discovered the "secrets" to success: practice and perseverance.

"Does it apply what it learns?"

"Yes."

As 20Q implements what it learns, so do I. Throughout high school, I applied the "secret" of practice to my basketball career. I spent countless hours sharpening my skills in 90° summer heat to 20° late-winter cold, countless afternoons playing pickup games with my friends, and countless weekends traveling to AAU basketball tournaments. As a result, I became a starter for my school's varsity team. I applied another "secret," this time the "secret" of perseverance, by dedicating myself to physical therapy after knee surgery in order to quickly return to football. Later that year, I became the first player in my grade to score a varsity touchdown.

"Does it attempt to better itself?"

"Yes."

Once I became proficient at Twenty Questions, I strengthened my resolve to become masterful. To do so, I needed to become a skillful inquisitor and to combine that with my analytical nature and interpersonal skills, all of which are vital for success in Twenty Questions. Because I had been debating politics with my friends since the 8th grade, I



receive a nomination for The United States Senate Youth Program.

“Does it think deeply?”

“Yes.”

So far, I have realized that thriving at Twenty Questions, just like life, is all about tenacity, rationality and interpersonal skills. I have found that, as in Twenty Questions, always succeeding is impossible; however, by persevering through difficulties and obstacles, favorable outcomes are often attainable. As I have become better at Twenty Questions, so too have I improved in many other aspects of my life. Nonetheless, I realize that I still have unbounded room to grow. And much like 20Q, I will continue to learn throughout my life and apply my knowledge to everything I do.

“Are you thinking of me?”

“Yes.”

Admissions Committee Comments

We were impressed by the unique format Ben chose to describe himself and the lessons learned through his interest in computer science. However, the essay's creative style succeeds due to the strength of its content. Ben simulates electronic 20 questions to hook the reader's attention while effectively bridging his academic interests and future aspirations. The essay showcases his versatile interests, from computer science to basketball to political debate, as concrete examples that demonstrate his personal philosophy of 'practice and perseverance.' The essay successfully tells us about Ben's personality, academic and social interests, and future ambitions, showing us a competitive student who would thrive here.

JUSTIN

A Study in Ambidexterity

I was born with an extra hand—kind of. Anatomically, I'm normal. I don't have a third arm protruding from the center of my chest or anything of the sort. I do, however, have the unusual ability to use both hands equally well. When I was little, I thought of my ambidexterity as a fun trick. I always liked to play with people when learning a new skill:

“Okay, now are you right or left handed?”

“I don't know,” I would answer with a comical smile. Or even better, “Pick one for me.”

It's a bit silly, but I enjoyed the simple satisfaction of being different. For me, ambidexterity has always meant versatility. From using my left hand in a restrictive corner while doing yardwork to switch-hitting in baseball depending on the context of the game, my hands give me the flexibility to adapt to my surroundings. As I've grown, however, I've realized that ambidexterity means more than just its quirky face value. It's synonymous with many of the other components of my character.

Ambidexterity is part of who I am, yet it's something few people know I have. It makes sense that only my closest friends know about my dual-handed capabilities. Although I use my talent throughout my day, it usually blends in with the normal functions of anyone else's hands. In this sense, ambidexterity isn't some glaring anomaly: It's only when you realize it's there does it become special.

Similarly, much of who I am remains unnoticed at first glance, not because of insignificance but because of initial perception. Most of the people who know me have no clue I'm valedictorian; I'm the kid making paper airplanes at the end of class. The rest don't realize I “do more than just school” but are pleasantly surprised to see me dancing around as Risky Business Tom Cruise for Halloween or just hanging out all over town on weekends. I like to think that ambidexterity helps me juggle these different parts of myself without letting anything go.

In my job as a Little League umpire, I have three distinct identities. To the league manager, I'm the responsible, quick-replying emailer and the primary person for the job. To the coaches, I'm a wave of relief—they know I'm going to make the right call. To the young players, I'm the umpire who gives helpful tips as well as the one they feel comfortable joking around with. Though each of these roles helps me in their own way, collectively, they are the reason I was made the lead umpire of the league.

In terms of academics, ambidexterity means finishing a half-hour phone call trying to understand the complexities of William Faulkner and immediately turning around to text watered-down calculus explanations to help another student. My ability to transition quickly has helped me establish myself as a go-to helper in nearly every subject, but these behind-the-scenes interactions happen away from my teachers' eyes. Even teachers, however, see the respect other students have for me during class discussions. Outside of class, other students come to me because they recognize that I genuinely want to help guide them toward their own success.