

My Sister and My Friend

We all have siblings that annoy us. We fight with them over dumb things like who gets to sit next to the window in the car and who gets to go first on the slide. We get jealous when they get more attention or have success. This can be especially true if you are a middle child. You always feel like everyone else gets better things in life than you, especially your younger siblings. But do we really realize how much of an influence our brothers and sisters can have in our lives? Do we recognize the unique friendship we can gain with them? Or do we waste our lives trying to find friendship and approval somewhere else? I didn't always appreciate my little sister, but over time, I realized she was actually one of my best friends.

The first time I realized I might not despise my sister was when I moved thousands of miles away to live in Seoul, Korea as a missionary for our church. Missionaries weren't allowed to call home more than twice a year, but we could communicate via letter and email. As I wrote to my family, I realized for the first time how much I missed them, and to my surprise, that included my little sister. Maybe it was the constant preaching about "loving one another" but I suddenly found myself remembering all the mean things I'd said and done over the years. Stupid things like refusing to kneel next to her during family prayer or telling her that she sounded like a dying seal every time she played the clarinet. She eventually quit band all together, and I suddenly found myself wondering if it was at least partly because of me. Why did I always have to point out her flaws? I vowed that when I returned home, things would be different. I would be different.

But once I got home, I quickly returned to college and didn't see my sister much. I got wrapped up in my own friends, my own dreams, and my own worries. My sister started to date lots of boys, and I was jealous of this. It seemed like dating came so easily to her, and she didn't

even appreciate the boys who bent over backwards to try to impress her. There was one guy in particular who really worked hard to get her. He bought her flowers and jewelry. He invited her on the family cruise to Mexico. And it wasn't just that he was rich. He was also a really good guy, a returned missionary, and super smart. She said he was nice, but for some reason she just didn't feel like she loved him. Looking back, I can see that I shouldn't have judged her, but at the time, I couldn't understand it. In any case, I was sure she'd find the right guy soon, get married, and start having babies.

Once again, I was surprised. She didn't get married right away, and neither did I. We both started careers instead and eventually moved to different states. We kept in touch, but in our phone calls I usually just gave a general overview of what was happening with work and friends, nothing too personal. She basically did the same thing. Then, about six years after graduating from college, I started to feel really unhappy with my life. I knew something needed to change but I didn't know what. The whole world seemed dark and black with nothing to look forward to and no way to get out. It was like being in a deep, dark prison, but no one could see the bars but me. What should I do? Who could I turn to? Strangely, I found myself calling the last person I thought I would, my little sister.

I started with some basic small talk, but somehow, it suddenly all came rushing out. I told her that I was feeling miserable and alone. I told her that I wasn't sure what I was doing with my life anymore. I probably talked for at least twenty minutes straight, but my sister just listened. When I was done, she told me that she knew I would figure it out. She told me that I was amazing and that she believed in me.

Though we were miles apart, I suddenly felt as if she were right there with me, and I realized that she had said exactly what I needed to hear. In that moment, I was so grateful for my

little sister, and I know anyone can feel what I felt. The question is, are you ready to see your sibling in a new way? Are you ready to open your heart to the person who has been by your side this whole time? It took me way too long to realize what my little sister meant to me. But you don't have to wait so long. Reach out to your sibling today! Give them a call or at least send a text. If you do, it can change your life, just like it changed mine.

	Rough Draft (answers and examples from the essay)
Narrative Structure: Is the structure of the story clear and compelling? Does the essay feel too short or too long? Do the details and events in the story all contribute to the main idea? Or are there extra details and events that don't really fit or seem to just fill up space?	
Vivid details: Does the story include one vivid moment where the change happens? Are there other details that help you see, smell, hear, touch, or feel the experience?	
Message: Does the author let the story speak for itself? Are you, as the reader, allowed to decide what it means? Or does the essay feel like a lecture (where the author tells you what to think and how to change--whether their message applies to you or not)?	

This Little Light of Mine

From the moment she took my place in the crib, my little sister seemed to outshine me. Her golden curls and dimples seemed to suck away all the attention in a room. My mom even gave her the nickname “Sunshine.” Well if she was the sunshine, I was the storm cloud, and I did everything I could to overshadow her. I was older, bigger, and smarter, and I let her know it every chance I got.

As we got to elementary and middle school, my resentment only deepened. I started struggling with my weight around fourth grade, but my sister could eat anything and never seemed to gain an ounce. I was awkward and didn’t make friends easily, but my little sister was the brightest spot in any conversation. Old people liked her. Babies liked her. And as she got into high school, it didn’t take long for teenage boys to make it clear they really liked her, too. Even *my* friends liked her. It made me want to scream.

Eventually I started college and didn’t see my sister much. I made new friends, travelled to other countries, and tried to find adventure wherever I could. My sister continued to date lots of boys, and I was sure she’d get married before finishing college.

But that’s not how things worked out. She didn’t get married, and neither did I. We both started careers instead and eventually moved to different states. We kept in touch, but in our phone calls we usually just gave a general overview of what was happening with work and friends, nothing too personal. Then, about six years after graduating from college, I found myself unhappy with my career as an elementary teacher, dumped by my most recent boyfriend, and scared about my future. What would I do with myself? Strangely, I found myself calling the last person I thought I would, my little sister.

I started with some basic small talk, but somehow, it suddenly all came rushing out. I felt like a failure; I felt like I would never find love; I was terrified that I'd end up angry and alone, just like our parents had after their divorce. I didn't know who I was or what I was doing. I thought about going to grad school, but what if I wasn't smart enough? What if I failed at that too? Everything was a mess. I was a mess.

As I talked, my little sister was quiet. She listened until the flood of emotion stopped, and then she simply said: "Sis, you are an amazing person. You are so smart! You are so beautiful. Forget that dumb boy, and go on your next adventure!"

I laughed. "Yeah, I guess."

"You'll do great," she insisted. "You know, it's because of you that I found the courage to get out of the house, go to college, go to South America, and chase my own dreams. I'm so glad you're my big sister—you've always been an amazing example to me."

"Really?" I whispered.

"Really," she said. "You can do anything. I know it."

I felt a huge lump block my throat. A few hot tears escaped from my eyes, and then realization finally dawned on me. All this time I'd been working so hard to find approval. All these years I'd been chasing success, hoping to find my worth in my grades, a new boyfriend, another stamp in my passport, or a career. I'd been working so hard to find someone or something to tell me I was good enough, and all this time, what I wanted had been right there. Acceptance. Love. Total confidence. My little sister had been trying to share all of that with me for years, but wrapped up in my own little clouds of ego and self-doubt, I'd shut her out.

Though we were miles apart, I suddenly felt as if she were right there with me, and I realized that the light and warmth I felt wasn't just coming from her, it was coming from both of us. We were both capable, amazing, and bright.

So I decided to believe her. I decided I would get up and start again. I could figure out job stuff. I could figure out grad school. Maybe I could even figure out dating. Whatever happened, I knew I wasn't alone. Wherever I went, and whenever I needed her, my little sister would be there to help light the way.

	Final Essay (answers and examples from the essay)
Narrative Structure: Is the structure of the story clear and compelling? Does the essay feel too short or too long? Do the details and events in the story all contribute to the main idea? Or are there extra details and events that don't really fit or seem to just fill up space?	
Vivid details: Does the story include one vivid moment where the change happens? Are there other details that help you see, smell, hear, touch, or feel the experience?	
Message: Does the author let the story speak for itself? Are you, as the reader, allowed to decide what it means? Or does the essay feel like a lecture (where the author tells you what to think and how to change--whether their message applies to you or not)?	

3. Using the text box, write 4 - 5 sentences about how reading these sample essays might help you write your own essay. Does it help you see what kind of voice and tone works (or does not work) for a personal essay? Does it give you ideas for how to start or end? Does it help you understand how to capture vivid details? Does it help you see how you can use dialogue?