**Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?**

Ever since my first biopolymer experiment in G9 with cornstarch and vinegar, science has dissolved in me and polymerized in my brain. Experiments become my reason for learning and going to school. Unfortunately, C-19 (not C the carbon) hit and experiments had to stop as everything turned online. It felt like a switch in me was forced to be turned off as I started to lose motivation in school.

To motivate myself, I turned my mom’s kitchen into a lab: I used her oven for drying glassware and mixtures, her blender sticks to whisk banana peels, her Pyrex measuring cups as beakers, her strainer as filter, etc. in an attempt to do perform biopolymer experiments. It most definitely annoyed my mom because of the messes.

Continuing on to my biopolymer venture, I realized how much crab shell wastes were produced as I finished my favorite steamed crab dishes. There was some kind of waxy texture inside the shell. “Is wax kind of polymeric?” I thought to myself. So I did some research to validate my hypothesis and found that crustacean shells contain chitin that enhances bioplastic properties.

“It is possible to make biopolymers from crab shells!”

I immediately wanted to perform this experiment in my “lab.” However, it wasn’t feasible because the experiment would require the use of strong acids and bases. My mom would be furious. Plus, it is not safe.

Trying to realize my experiment plan, I contacted the school asking for permission to do the experiment, but they did not approve. To convince them, I did more research on Design of Experiments, detailed the step-by-step procedures, and wrote a proposal with timelines and safety measures. It wasn’t until several months later that they approved my experiment under strict conditions. Once more, I was able to continue my passion in science.

Although my learning motivation and journey weren’t smooth because of the sudden change of learning environment, it definitely didn’t stop me from pursuing my passion: Science. Something that started off as a reason to not lose motivation, had just given me more reasons to fulfill my passion.

WC: 350 words (maxed out)

Hi Darren,

I have read over your essay and I must stay that you sound like a very smart and resourceful student. From your home experiments to writing up proposals, I can sense your persistence in fulfilling your passion. Through your essay, you also paved a sort of story line from when you encountered the challenge (COVID-19) until when you eventually overcame that through your persistence. However, I believe that there is so many ways to really maximize your essay to answer the prompt: **Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?**

It’s easy to write a simple plot / overarching story of your persistence, but often times, this way of writing leads to loose ends. Though you mentioned the most significant challenge (or challenges in this essay), you barely touched the latter part of the prompt, which is to describe HOW this challenge affected your academic achievement. I understand it might be hard to visualize how this challenge affected your studies because of the pandemic but try asking around to your teachers and parents if they noticed anything different from your academic performance. This way, you can fully answer the prompt given.

Moreover, UC essays only give you 350 words maximum to write a compelling piece of essay which means that you should always focus on maximizing your word count to answer all the questions. Your essay, though explains everything you did, doesn’t seem to answer all the questions. This means that you should take some time to weed out unnecessary details. You don’t need to mention everything that happened, instead focus on the main points/events that really keep you pushing forward through this challenge. If otherwise you want to keep details, try to focus on one particular challenge (or the bigger picture challenge) and expand on it. This will help create a nice and centered focus on your essay.

Lastly, don’t forget to pay attention to the choice of words. As a STEM student in university myself, I understand the excitement and insatiable curiosity when it comes to research but when you’re writing an essay about this, remember that your Admissions Officer may not know what you’re saying. You may use scientific jargons to spice up your essay, but make sure the context and meaning is maintained throughout. Don’t accidentally confuse your AOs.

I look forward to the development of this essay. If you need further assistance from me personally or any other essay editor, you may contact your mentor for that.

* Calysta Tesiman, ALL-In Eduspace Essay Editor