

UT Austin Topic S: There may be personal information that you want considered as part of your admissions application. Write an essay describing that information. You might include exceptional hardships, challenges, or opportunities that have shaped or impacted your abilities or academic credentials, personal responsibilities, exceptional achievements or talents, educational goals, or ways in which you might contribute to an institution committed to creating a diverse learning environment.

When I began 6th grade and started my school's band program, I was ecstatic. Many of my peers were frustrated that a music class was required, but I couldn't wait to start. My father had told me about playing trumpet in his high school marching band, and I was eager to take up the instrument as a sort of family talent. I quickly discovered that I had vastly underestimated the amount of effort needed to get remotely good at playing music. Though I felt like quitting many times, my budding passion for music pushed me to continue with it.

By the time sophomore year rolled around, I found myself repeatedly second-guessing my decisions to continue playing in band. I loved the people, the atmosphere, and most of all the music, but I couldn't help but ask myself if there was something I was missing. More and more, I found myself drawn towards French horn composers such as Richard Strauss and music that featured it such as that by John Williams. I realized that my decreasing interest in band was due to my choice of instrument. I abandoned my prior goals of mastering the trumpet and devoted myself to learning the French horn. The biggest factor that drew me to the horn is its expressive nature. I was no longer limited expressionistically by the timbre of my choice of instrument. With a bit of love, inspiration, and a tiny bit of luck, the horn can become an extension of your lungs, acting as a second voice.

I also picked up drums starting when I was 12. Teaching myself with only the help of the internet, I was able to learn how best to make the kit respond to my playing. I took to playing with my school's Stage Band when I started freshman year. I still have sheets of music where the entire page was jazz 'improv' markings. Designated by only four slashes, the markings are intended to give musicians freedom in their playing. By being given such freedom, and learning how to apply it to my horn playing, I was able to better learn how to express myself through my passion.

In middle school, along with starting band, I also started a course on computer programming in Java. Though most of what I learned went way over my head, it piqued my interests in such a field and pushed me to find resources to learn more. When I got to high school, along with a close friend, I co-founded hackCLUB in partnership with hackEDU. hackEDU is a non-profit designed to give students themselves a foundation for teaching computer literacy to other students. For over a year and a half, we taught lessons on computer programming and web design after school to more than a dozen of our eager peers. Positive experiences binge-coding at hackathons (essentially judged speed-coding contests) only further served to drive me towards a goal of mastering the field.

In music, there's an infinite number of ways to play a song. Sure, there's the notes on the paper, but depending on the venue, the audience, and your emotions, the decisions you make shape the piece and make it your own. Not only does channeling my emotions into my playing feel more fulfilling, but it also serves to make a piece feel more fluid and natural. A good musician can do wonders with even a cheaply made instrument. The 'right way' isn't always the best, and the biggest factors in how 'good' a performance is are all subjective. Conversely, in computer programming, there's only really one way to do things. You can choose what language

you write an algorithm or program in, or what way parts of the program function, but there's always a 'best' way to do something. Expressivity goes out the window in the face of optimization and increasing functionality.

The skills that I have learned through pursuing both of my passions have left me well-rounded. Through pursuing computer science, I have been able to apply many of the skills I have learned throughout my schooling, and through playing horn I have been able to express myself with music.