

First page

Hi you :)

This is my literacy autobiography.

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Welcome.

I am Hassan, a 22-year-old student at UC Berkeley studying Applied Mathematics.

This, in front of you, is the door to my mind. If you choose to venture through it, you will find a maze of stories, a labyrinth of adventures. Once inside the maze, the only way out is through. To make it to the other side, you will need to focus on following the thread of my thoughts and memories.

Go ahead—step over the threshold.

Try not to get lost.

[Enter]

Love

I have a lot of memories about becoming literate, but let me start with one I have about love, because who doesn't love love (see what I did there? ^-^). After talking about love, I will narrate my memories chronologically.

I dated several women, but I only loved a few. To those I loved, I expressed my feelings in many, many, so many forms. Some forms were literate, and the love I felt was, in fact, an effective motivation to becoming a better literate.

Here is an example. I had noticed that, if we numbered the alphabetic letters, took my first name and the one of the woman I loved at the time, added the numbers of each letter, and summed the digits of that result, we would get the number 8 for both names.

Let me illustrate. My name would be:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

H A S S A N
8 + 1 + 19 + 19 + 1 + 14
= 62
6 + 2
= 8

Similarly, her name added up to a number whose digits summed up to 8. So, after telling her about it, 8 became the number that represented us, and I wrote her this:

[illegible]

ADHD (Young age)

Alright, enough with the lovey love stuff. Let's go back in time now. Year 2002, I was 8 years old, and I remember being in my house with my private tutor learning my History and Geography lesson. After a lot of time studying, I had finally managed to learn the lesson by heart and was given permission to go play. Once my mother came back from work, the tutor told her happily that I had learned my lesson very well, and asked me to recite it to my mother. I couldn't. I had forgotten everything. I was shocked, scared, and blocked. I couldn't remember anything from the lesson. Sad, I cried.

My mother took me to a doctor with my brother who was 3 years older than I was. We were apparently hyperactive and were recommended to play sports. We tried so many sports: tennis, basketball, volleyball, swimming, karate, soccer, running. It was fun, but I never kept playing only one sport—I liked playing a little bit of all. In high school, all my friends were playing soccer, so I gave up the other sports. I enrolled in a professional club, where I trained every day. I loved it.

If you are familiar with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), you would have noticed the symptoms of this condition in my behavior. I received the right support to overcome the difficulties that came with it, but I never took any medications, and I don't believe I need any. So my brain makes it hard to remember all those words and boring lessons, big deal, at least I am able to excel in Mathematics and other scientific subjects easily.

Indeed, I have always had an ease with Mathematics, ever since I can remember: manipulating numbers, visualizing equations, and tying them together in my mind before needing to write them on paper. This allowed me to always have the best grades in my Math classes with minimal effort. When my high school Mathematics teacher noticed that I was sleeping in class and still getting the best grades, he was prompted to write about it on my transcripts, saying that I "certainly had a talent in Mathematics."

I noticed how much difficulty some students were having with this subject in high school, so I started programming calculators and selling them to students (once, I found out that my parents had serious financial issues, so I put the money I had earned into their wallets without their knowledge. Years later, when I told them about it, they said that they thought it was a miracle when they saw the money appearing from nowhere. Funny). The programmed calculators output solutions to numerous mathematical problems, which allowed students to check if their answers were right. For instance, one of the programs I wrote output the prime numbers. If the student entered 273 in the program, it output "13*3*7," and if the student entered 89, it output "Prime number."

When I was studying for an upcoming Math test, I sometimes locked the door of my room during the weekend and studied from morning to night. Sometimes, I coined new mathematical formulas, and thought that I was discovering concepts and formulas no one had discovered before, even naming the formulas myself. A few weeks later, when we were moving forward in the content taught in class, I was noticing my formulas being mentioned, and I realized that they were discovered years and years before. That was the moment I realized that I had the capacity to discover or create new things in Mathematics, but in order to truly discover new mathematical concepts, I would need to learn everything that was discovered so far. That meant years of studying. I then wondered, was that what I wanted to do all my life? Even if we assume that I am one of the few people who has the ability to do it, does it necessarily mean that I should? On those weekends I spent studying, I was alone in my room with nothing but a pen and paper. On the other hand, during weekends when I was not studying, I was playing soccer all day long, and since I was on the varsity team of my high school, we traveled to many cities, and we actually won the national championship 3 years in a row. I was definitely not ready to give up that fun for studying.

Soccer shoes

Soccer shoes didn't last a long time with me; after I wore them for several games, the wear and tear was apparent enough for me to get a new pair and give the old ones to my coach, who collected soccer equipment that we didn't use. One day, a new player, Mehdi, came to the field. He was playing against me, and when he tried to pass me, I kicked him and he fell. When he pulled off his shoes to see if he were injured, I recognized my old shoes, same size and color, and same holes!

I was shocked. After asking around, I understood why he was wearing them. Basically, my coach would pick the eight best soccer players from the streets, give them equipment, and team them up with the eight best players from my high school, Lycee Lyautey. That way, we formed a soccer team composed of privileged kids coming from one of the most expensive high schools in the country, and unfortunate kids to whom life had not been generous. In other words, this association allowed people from different social backgrounds to merge through soccer, forming a team called Foot Ensemble that competed with other soccer teams in Casablanca.

I was too shy to tell Mehdi that the shoes had been mine. As a teammate, I was exposed to Mehdi's world; our relationship allowed me to recognize the value of the many things I took for granted and helped me recognize my privileges. Mehdi inspired me to become more than a soccer player for the organization, and become a volunteer to make a promotional movie to gain more funds and attract more ambitious players. This movie premiered at the Theater of the French Institute of Casablanca, and can be watched here:

Part 1, 2, and 3:

<https://youtu.be/Cljhlx6M5u4>

<https://youtu.be/1eXT1XW38mQ>

<https://youtu.be/QY6oH0vd06Q>

This project illustrates how the social meaning of literacy works in real life. "It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors". (Jewitt, 241) In fact, those arrays were merged in my literacy.

My own quote (End of highschool)

My following experience is connected to the concept of culturally relevant teaching. “Bartolome has argued for a humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses the reality, history and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice”. (Ladson-Billings, 160) Culturally relevant teaching is crucial to our literacy, as it enables us to develop our critical self-awareness and cultural competence.

It was the end of high school, and I had decided to coin a quote that represented me best. It said, ‘Innovation starts by realizing that being wrong actually means being different from what people think is right.’

In fact, after reflecting thoroughly on my life, I realized that I have always been a person who does things differently, creating alternate paths than the ones people around me are following. My education had much to do with my ideals of blazing new trails. In my family, my mother was the only woman who put her children in a French educational system. This made me realize how deeply tied to French culture I am, and how education impacts greatly one's belief systems. After my high school graduation, more than ninety percent of my schoolmates went to pursue their studies in France, and although I was accepted at one of the best universities of France in Mathematics, I decided not to go. I did not want my past to decide how I would spend the rest of my life. The fact that it was chosen for me to be in a French educational system was not enough of a reason to stay there.

My doubt skyrocketed when I started having frustrating experiences with the French educational system. For instance, in my Arabic class at 16 years old, my teacher suspended me from class and took me to the principal's office because I did not want to use a black notebook. Every student in my class was following his directions of using a notebook with a black cover, but I always wrote on loose-leaf white paper. That way I was able to organize the papers the way I felt most convenient, which helped me when I was studying. The teacher didn't accept that.

Another frustration was in my philosophy class. In the first weeks, I was getting 60% on my homework assignments. After spending weeks trying to increase my grades, to no avail, I asked a friend who got good grades in the class to give me his homework before turning it in. I made my homework using his ideas but rephrasing them. The results: I got around 60% and he got more than 90%. I completely lost interest in that class. I either did not go to class anymore or went and slept there. Too bad—I actually liked the subject. I clearly remember how at the age of 13, I read the entire philosophy textbook from my older brother's class, along with the books written by the mentioned philosophers, and how I wrote my own book on philosophy.

A final frustration I will share was the one I had during the final exam of the French class. I had studied really hard all year long for that final and had managed to learn and remember everything taught in class. When the day of the exam came, I was asked what I thought about the book *Alice au pays des merveilles*. I said that I did not like it, that I had watched the cartoon when I was young, read the book now, watched the movie, and still did not like it. I said that I understood what we were taught in class in regard to the clock representing, and the rabbit representing (and basically said everything I learned from the class notes), but that it was not the best way to convey the message that we are told the author was trying to communicate. I said that, if in fact that was the goal of the author to pass that message, then he should have done it using formats such as the ones used by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Émile ou de l'éducation*. Creating talking rabbits and other fantastic creatures is not much more than playful imagination.

I was asked my opinion about the book, so I gave it. I made sure, however, that I said what I had learned about the book, which was everything that was taught in class. I would assume that I would at least get credit for learning them. The grade I got on that test? Five and seven out of 20. A friend of mine from soccer, who never came to class, never took any notes, and barely studied before the test, received about the double of my grade.

So yeah. I was definitely not staying in that educational system.

I went online and started researching other educational systems in the world. Discovering the one in the US, I was intrigued by how they were the best ranked universities in the world, while giving students the freedom to choose the classes they wanted to study regardless of their major, and yet allowing students to do extracurricular activities.

I was 17, and I could definitely not afford paying the tuitions at US colleges. So I started by taking an online course offered by Stanford University called Technology Entrepreneurship. During this course, four students and I created Artistii (artistii.com), a company that sells handmade crafts created by artisans who live in remote villages in various countries around the world. We were basically offering services (marketing, payments, shipping) that allowed the artisans to compete effectively in a global market. After passing this class and receiving a certificate of completion, I was convinced that I wanted to study in the US.

Technology

Technology played an enormous role in my education. How did I learn that there was an educational system better than the one I was in? I Googled it. How did I find the agency that got me the scholarships to study in the US? I Googled it. How did I teach myself to play the guitar and piano? Google again.

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Side note, here is a song my friend and I made in high school; don't hesitate to send me a message telling me what you think about it. ;)

<https://soundcloud.com/hankir/hankir-feat-frontkick-id>

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The scholarship agency I found online asked me to send them videos of my soccer games, and my scores for the TOEFL, SAT, and ACT. With that, they contacted soccer coaches and were able to find me scholarships from 5 colleges in the US. One of them, a college in Texas, offered me a full ride scholarship, but I chose the offer from the college in Miami instead, even though the scholarship was much less. Why? Because, you know, Miami.

Again, I hope I explained it clearly. Without the access to technology that I had, my whole life would have been completely different. Had I not had that access to the internet, I would have never ended up where I am today. I can't stress that enough: technology is a huge asset in education, perhaps the most important one. That is why I am such a fan of initiatives like internet.org by Facebook, which tries to give internet access to everyone in the world through solar-powered airplanes.

Another way technology played a major role in how I became literate is through YouTube. Here are a couple of channels I have been following for years. I have watched all the videos from these channels and all the videos from similar channels as well. It is such an entertaining way to learn.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/minutephysics>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/1veritasium>

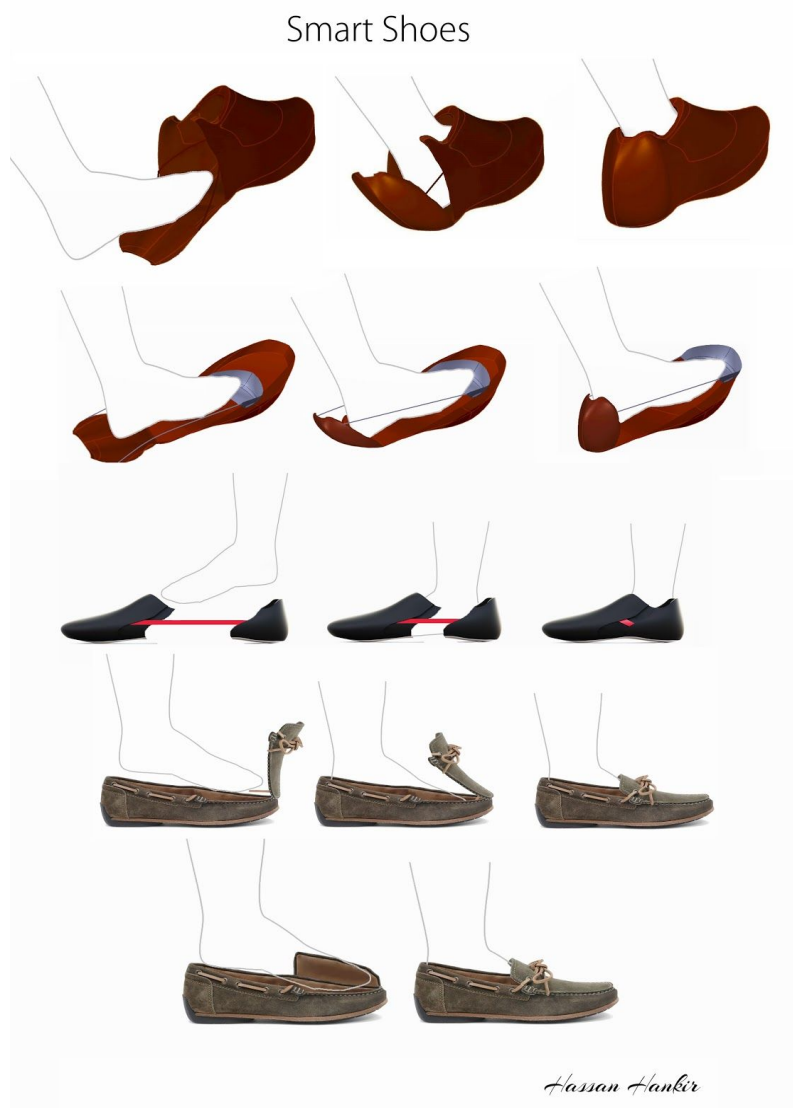
<https://www.youtube.com/user/scishow>

Then there is khanacademy.org, a resource that proved effective when I needed to review topics I had learned in previous years.

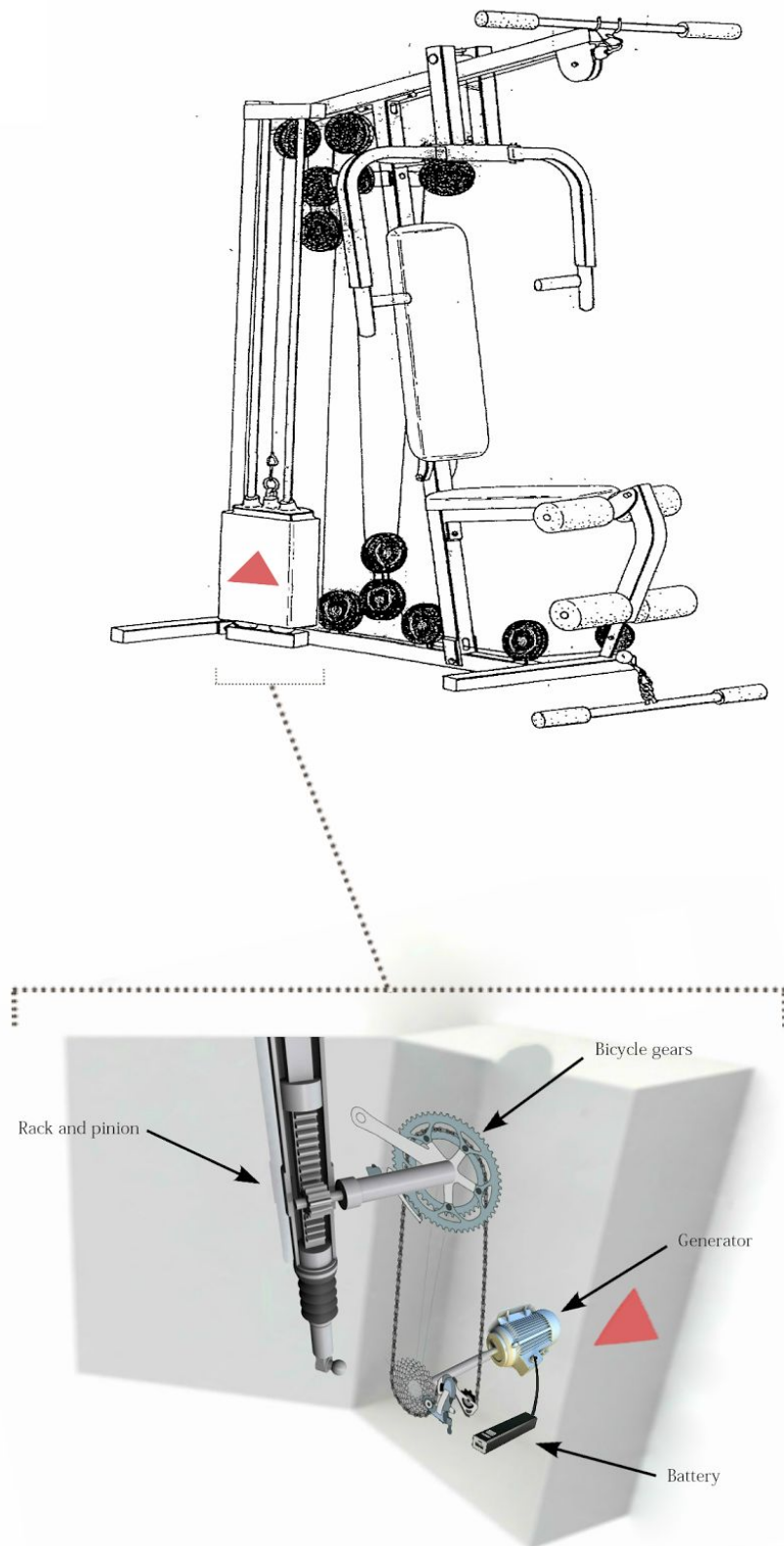
Sketches (in the US)

After my first year in the US, I went back to Morocco to visit my family during summer. I realized that the infrastructures to help disabled people were almost nonexistent in Morocco. Hence, I wanted to do something about it. I started by making a few designs that can help all sorts of disabled person. For example, I patented a shoe mechanism that enables someone to put on shoes without use of hands and without the need of bending forward, by simply stepping on the shoe. That way, people with hand or back disabilities could put on any shoe they like without anyone's assistance.

These were my first design sketches:

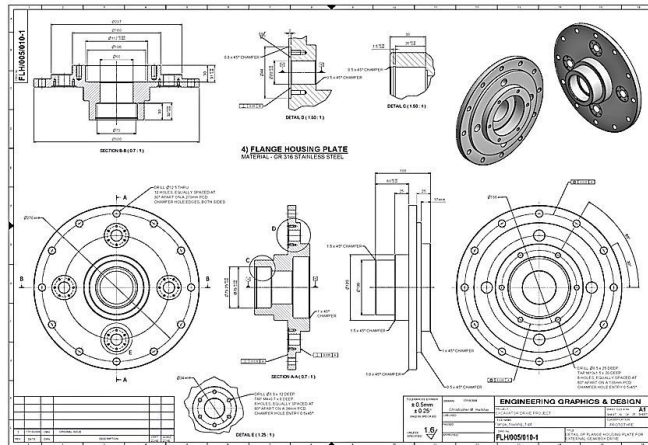


When I tried to have these designs manufactured, and this other one as well :



Hassan Hankir

I was told that my designs were not using the right format for manufacturing, so I took a class called Engineering Print Reading for Industry (even if it was not going to count toward my degree). In this class, I learned to make designs like this one:



After I saw how valuable the skills I gained were, I decided to take more classes that were not going to count toward my degree, but still of interest to me in terms of the knowledge that I would acquire. Therefore, I took Intro to Web Programming, and Solar Energy. I was then able to do this project:

<http://cloudtosun.cloudvent.net/>

I gradually started expanding my reach, looking to make a much bigger impact. Hence, I attended the Fourth Estate Leadership Summit by Invisible Children, which helps abducted children escape from Joseph Kony and the LRA. During this Leadership Summit at UCLA, I met Guillaume Kayo, a French Project Coordinator of the organization who lives in the Central African Republic. We decided to start a club for the organization that would raise awareness across the French-speaking world of the battle against these atrocities.

Here is the video of the Leadership Summit:

<https://vimeo.com/103457094>



<https://give.invisiblechildren.com/fundraise/team?ftid=24558>

Before I end this section, I would like to talk about something that happened in my Math class few years ago that I can't seem to forget. The teacher gave us an opportunity for 5% extra credit by doing 20+ hours of community service in one of the nonprofits near our school. My grade was already higher than an A, but I still did the 20+ hours because I saw it as a very smart initiative; it blended in education the act of helping the community. When I compare it to the way charity works in Morocco, I realize that people there mostly gave away money to beggars, instead of actually going to the people in need and spending time to share knowledge and development. Food for thought.

Homeless

On October 18, 2015, I became the richest homeless person in California. It is difficult to calculate the net worth of homeless people, so this might be hard to verify, but still safe to assume. Everything had started five months before, when my father was laid off. He tried finding another job, but his efforts were in vain. At that point, I became the household income providers, paying for rent, food, and tuition, which cost me every dollar I had made.

On September 1, 2015, I had \$200 I was able to make by selling my bed. It was my budget for the entire month, and I had to find a way to use it for my rent, food, and tuition payment plan. With no family members on this side of the ocean and no friends willing to let me sleep at their house even though I asked repeatedly, I had no choice but to live on the street. I became homeless. A year before this, I had lived in a \$3,000-a-month apartment, but now I couldn't afford to live anywhere; even the cheapest place for rent was unreachable. If only I had bought a car when I could have, I would at least have slept in the car, but who would have thought that things could go so wrong so fast?

Being a homeless person is extremely difficult, as expected, but not for the obvious reasons of hunger, cold, the pain of sleeping on the floor, or lack of hygiene. It is being mentally lost, not having a place to call home, a reference to go to when the day is over, a center to one's universe. Consequently, I wasn't able to focus on studying or working, no matter how hard I tried. After few days of being lost and trying desperately to get my focus back, I discovered what I needed: habits. When I formed daily habits of eating at the same place, studying at the same table in the public library, and sleeping in the same corner, I was able to get my focus back. In a way, I had made my own house out of public places. Also, I realized that social perception was a big part of surviving this period, so I kept wearing my Ralph Lauren shirt and Hugo Boss belt, and went regularly to the beach to shower.

I was back on track, got my grades back up, and found comfort in my new life. One problem was still not resolved, though: my father hadn't found a job yet. So how do you help your father who can't find a job anywhere? You create a company and get him a job there.

Therefore, I started reading books on successful business pitches, and composed a formula that predicts the success rate of a pitch using variables such as founders' education, marketing strategies, industry, innovation, etc. Then I tested my formula on a database I made from the 493 companies featured in the six seasons of the reality television series Shark Tank. The formula received 87.02% accuracy on the test and became the heart of the mathematical model that I used to build a business plan.

After many sleepless nights, I had a very detailed business plan ready, pitched it to investors, and waited. October 18, 2015, arrives, a date that will forever be engraved in my memory. At 7 a.m., drops of water on my face wake me up. It's raining. A smile shines on my face—after all, it only rains a few times a year in this city, and for that rain to happen when I am sleeping in the street, and at the perfect hour to wake me up . . . What a feeling. A few minutes later, I receive a call from one of the investors I pitched to. Good news, great news: I did it! I raised \$100,000 in exchange for shares of my company.

My philosophy of life was to “make the best out of the least.” Now, my family and I have roofs to sleep under, and the rest is history.

UC Berkeley

In my previous memory, we can notice that I used the functional literacy concept. "Today, functional literacy is conceived broadly as the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings".(Scribner, 3)

You made it to the final chapter. Almost done!

UC Berkeley. An amazing educational institution. But everyone knows that, so let's get critical here. One thing that bothered me at first in the way classes are taught here is how students are given an immense amount of information, but only a small portion of that information is relevant to getting a good grade in the class, or understanding it, for that matter.

In my Mathematics class, for instance, during the first weeks, I wasn't understanding anything, and I never had a Math class before where I didn't understand what was taught. However, after a few weeks of taking all the content, and cutting everything that didn't seem relevant, I ended up with 1 page summarizing 10 pages. That made the content much more concise and clear, as I was able to visualize the whole picture. It worked out well, since I had 93% on my midterm, while the average of the class was around 70%.

So I wondered, are the educators here not smart enough to give us a concise way to explain the content? If it was the case, the only thing left for us students to do would be to read and remember the formulas. Then I realized that Berkeley is a research university, so that must be done on purpose. Our educators want us to develop our research abilities, and not just remember a bunch of formulas and lessons. They actually deliberately give us all this immense amount of content, and expect us to sort through them ourselves. And isn't that what life is? Having a pile of information and resources all around, and what is needed is to be able to research, organize, and pick what we need in order to achieve whatever we want?

Anyway. It is only the beginning of my education at Berkeley, and I can't wait to see what the coming years hold for me. Assuming I find a way to pay my tuition

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