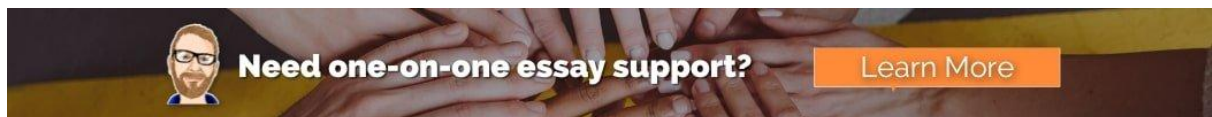
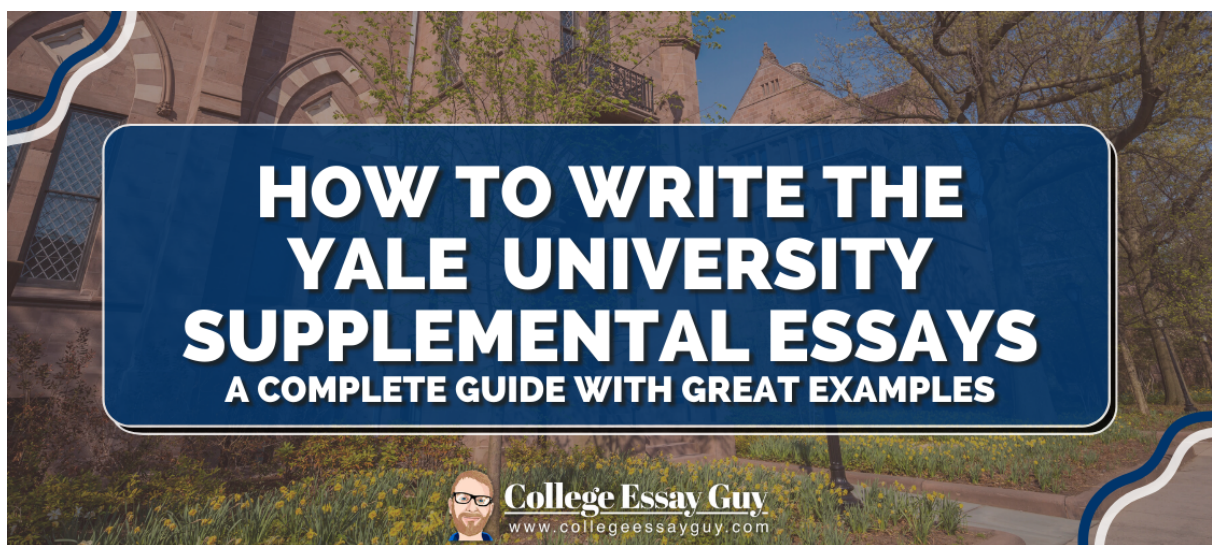


How to Write the Yale Supplemental Essays: Guide + Examples 2022/2023



HOW TO WRITE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

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While Yale was founded in 1702, it didn't become part of the Ivy League until the 1950s ... because the Ivy League didn't exist until the '50s, when it was created as an NCAA sports division, though people frequently think the term simply refers to an elite group of schools. Which Yale also definitely is.

The Yale supplemental essay prompts offer an opportunity to show many of the different, complex facets that make you both an interesting human being and a good candidate for acceptance. You'll want to take advantage of that opportunity by carefully considering your responses and using them to show variety.

If you want to get a clearer sense of all that Yale is looking for, you can explore an extensive, by-the-numbers look at its offerings, from enrollment and tuition statistics to student life and financial aid information, on its [Common Data Set](#). And for insights into how the university envisions itself and its role, and how it wants to grow and evolve, read its [sustainability plan](#) and [global strategy](#). Reading through these will give you a strong idea of what Yale values.

WHAT ARE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

Tell us about a topic or idea that excites you and is related to one or more academic areas you selected above. Why are you drawn to it? (200 words or fewer)

YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

What is it about Yale that has led you to apply? (125 words or fewer)

YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

Applicants submitting the Coalition Application or Common Application will also respond to the following short answer questions, in no more than 200 characters (approximately 35 words):

- *What inspires you?*
- *Yale's residential colleges regularly host conversations with guests representing a wide range of experiences and accomplishments. What person, past or present, would you invite to speak? What would you ask them to discuss?*
- *You are teaching a new Yale course. What is it called?*

- *What is something about you that is not included anywhere else in your application?*

YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #4

Applicants submitting the Coalition Application or Common Application will respond to one of the following prompts in 400 words or fewer.

- *Yale carries out its mission “through the free exchange of ideas in an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.” Reflect on a time when you exchanged ideas about an important issue with someone holding an opposing view. How did the experience lead you either to change your opinion or to sharpen your reasons for holding onto it?*
- *Reflect on a time when you have worked to enhance a community to which you feel connected. Why have these efforts been meaningful to you? You may define community however you like.*

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR YALE

HOW TO WRITE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

Tell us about a topic or idea that excites you and is related to one or more academic areas you selected above. Why are you drawn to it? (200 words or fewer)

This is a standard (but very short) “Why Major” prompt. For a larger guide to the “Why Major” essay, [click here](#). Below is a condensed version.

One possible approach:

Think of this as a quick origin story.

Step #1: Imagine a mini-movie of the moments that led you to your interest and create a simple, bullet-point outline.

Step #2: Put your moments (aka the “scenes” of your mini-movie) in chronological order, as it’ll help you see how your interests developed. It also makes it easier to write transitions.

Step #3: You’ll likely want to include a specific thesis that explicitly states your central argument—in this case, what you want to study and why. This thesis can come at the beginning, middle, or end of your essay.

Once you have those pieces, you have a few structural options:

Opening

- A. A quick hook that thematically sets up where you'll take us, and, ideally, shows an aspect of your intellect/personality (If you do this, it can be stylistically effective to bookend—to end the essay by linking back to what you opened with.)
- B. An initial moment that sparked your interest
- C. Your thesis

Body (but to clarify, this essay can be a single paragraph if you choose)

The moments of your mini-movie, illustrating both the development of your interest and some of your core values

Ending

One option: Go narrower—perhaps link to specific aspects of Yale that will help you continue on your path toward a future goal.

Another option: Go wider—name the road you hope to follow (for example, career path, organizations you'd like to work with, the greater value/implications of studying what you want to).

And last, a quick tip: Be sure this essay is consistent with your personal statement if you've mentioned aspects of your major/career there.

Here's a nice example essay (written by Luci Jones), written when the prompt had a shorter word count—so you'll have more room for your essay.

Example:

Storytelling has shaped me. At four, I read The Lion King until I'd memorized it. I'd snuggle in bed as my dad read Wilderness Champion or Tom Sawyer. Later, I found audio and visual storytelling, mesmerized by This American Life and Whiplash. Now, I create my own stories through newspaper satire, podcasting, and locally-broadcasted radio.

My major at Yale would be the next chapter in my life of storytelling. I'd explore past narratives and how they can be digitally innovated. Whether exploring media's disfiguration of truth, developing screenplays, or analyzing mise-en-scene, I hope to pioneer new networks of connection. (99 words)

Tips + Analysis

(Quickly) hook the reader. The first line performs a few functions here.

First, it pulls us in and makes us curious about what exactly she means by claiming that storytelling has shaped her. Second, it gives us a sense of a core aspect of her identity and values.

Show the development of your interest through moments that connect to core values. She packs a nice amount of detail into 99 words. The details she includes point toward her values and identity, as do her interests in newspaper satire, podcasting, and local radio. The details in the second paragraph show some nice depth and development.

Describe how Yale can help with the next steps. She links her brief origin story to how Yale can help her on her path, and how it will help her develop both her understanding and her values.

HOW TO WRITE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

What is it about Yale that has led you to apply? (125 words)

This is a standard but really short “Why us?” prompt. Because it’s so short, you’ll want to find a few specific reasons that set Yale apart from other schools you’re applying to. As the following guide explains, you’ll want to be sure to think of this as a “Why us?”—as in you + the school, and why you’d be a great fit together, and not simply “why them.” One way we sometimes joke about this is to think about the essay as though you’re helping the school understand why your online dating profile and its online dating profile are perfect for each other, and how you’d probably make great partners.

For a complete guide to “Why us?” essays, [click here](#). Here’s a condensed version:

Five Common Mistakes Students Make on “Why Us?” Essays

Mistake #1: Writing about the school’s size, location, reputation, weather, or ranking

Mistake #2: Simply using emotional language to demonstrate fit

Mistake #3: Screwing up the mascot, stadium, team colors or names of any important people or places on campus

Mistake #4: Parroting the brochures or website language

Mistake #5: Describing traditions the school is well known for

Mistake #6: Thinking of this as only a "why them" essay (as mentioned above)

So, if those are things you shouldn't write about, what *should* you write about? Here are some steps to figure that out.

Step #1: Do your research.

Spend 1 hr+ researching 10+ reasons why Yale might be a great fit for you (you'll only use a few of them, but try to find more than you'll need for the essay so you can choose the strongest).

Step #2: Use [this chart](#) to map out your research.

Step #3: Decide on your approach.

Approach #1: The "3-5 Unique Offerings" Strategy

Find 3-5 opportunities *that are particular to the school* (i.e., available at no other school or no other school you're applying to) and connect each one back to you.

Approach #2: The "One Value" Strategy

How it works: Identify one core value that links you to the school and tell a story. Like so:

1. Find a way in which you and the school are deeply aligned.
2. Take your time crafting the essay.
3. Find a way to be vulnerable.

Could I create a hybrid approach by focusing on a central theme, but still listing a few reasons?

Yup.

Here's a nice example essay (written by Luci Jones).

Example:

My life is the epitome of “and.” I have Chinese roots and am a proud North Carolinian. I am a team player and a leader. A bookworm and a backpacker. A creative thinker and logical problem-solver. I bridge divides. Like me, Yale embraces “and.”

While Yale has the resources of a large research university, its approach to academics fosters the intimacy of a liberal arts education. I could research abroad in Rabat and prepare for post-college work at CIPE, but also engage in small group discussions about world cinema and take an interdisciplinary class connecting creative writing, psychology, and digital media. Yale is a place that closes the gap. A place that offers a whole new world of “and” to explore and create. (123 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

(Quickly) hook the reader. As with the first essay, the opening line here pulls us in and makes us curious what exactly she means by this claim. This is a quick way to stand out from the rest.

Get really specific about the school + you. The second paragraph gets into some nice detail regarding what the school offers, with the contrast between the details illustrating a connection to a core aspect of how she sees herself (an embracer of “and”).

Bookending. With any essay, but especially one this short, bookending (using the final line to link back thematically to where the essay opened) can be a nice way to create a sense of closure while allowing you to devote most of your word count to details about the school and yourself.

Prompt 3 is a series of four short answer questions. For a more detailed guide, [click here](#).

As you approach these, keep in mind that each offers a chance to show the reader a new piece of yourself. Get really specific with your responses in ways that counterpoint nicely with other elements of your application. And along those lines, try not to repeat things that appear elsewhere.



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HOW TO WRITE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

Applicants submitting the Coalition Application or Common Application will also respond to the following short answer questions, in no more than 200 characters (approximately 35 words):

- What inspires you?
- Yale's residential colleges regularly host conversations with guests representing a wide range of experiences and accomplishments. What person, past or present, would you invite to speak? What would you ask them to discuss?
- You are teaching a new Yale course. What is it called?
- What is something about you that is not included anywhere else in your application?

These short answer questions can present a nice opportunity to show your personality, and allow for some juxtaposition against one another to demonstrate depth and complexity.

Here's some advice on how to approach short answer questions like these.

The examples below each do a nice job of showing values, intellect, and personality, and often contain a touch of humor.

Short answer 1: What inspires you? (200 characters; 35 words max)

Example:

Podcasts. Ira Glass and This American Life. Stories that hook you with the small moments, but leave you with the big lessons. Listening to voices and feeling connected to a radio network of humanity. (199 Characters)

Tips + Analysis

Think about the things people tend to be inspired by. Sunsets. Popular quotes. Songs. Then don't write about those things.

Instead, find something that is as specific to you as possible, and that allows you to share a new side of yourself. And get really specific with the "why." Plenty of people are inspired by podcasts, but the reflection and focus are what helps us feel like we know this student.

Short answer 2: Yale's residential colleges regularly host conversations with guests representing a wide range of experiences and accomplishments. What person, past or present, would you invite to speak? What would you ask them to discuss? (200 characters; 35 words max)

Examples:

Charles Darwin. Which came first: the chicken or the egg? (57 Characters)

— — —

Plato: at first for his smooth, gravelly voice—then I'd keep him for the philosophy. How could a Philosopher King know the wishes of those inside the Cave? Do their opinions matter? (181 characters)

— — —

My favorite poet, Wisława Szymborska. Question: In your poem "Photograph from September 11", why did you choose not to add a last line? (135 characters)

— — —

Short answer 3: You are teaching a new Yale course. What is it called? (200 characters; 35 words max)

Note: [Here's a longer guide for writing a "create-your-own-course" essay](#). While it won't apply as much here—since you're basically answering in just a few words—it may inspire you.

Here's a nice example.

Example:

Tweeting on the Golden Toilet: A Historical Look at the Social, Political, and Cultural Implications of Fake News in America (20 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

We like that, in just a few words, we get a feel for the author's sense of humor, her intellect, and her political and social values.

The structure here—an interesting, amusing course name, followed by a description that shows us values and intelligence—works nicely.

Short answer 4: What is something about you that is not included anywhere else in your application? (200 characters; 35 words max)

This one is wide open, for a reason. Rather than guide you with a more specific prompt, Yale is curious to see what you'd add here that you haven't had a chance to share yet. So look at it as one more chance to make your application profile stand out. Don't be daunted by the tiny word count. Sometimes, less is more.

Here are three examples that prove that out.

Examples:

Late nights working on the Katana ZERO fan game I started; coding, writing, drawing. The best part is posting in #daily-progress at 2am about what I accomplished. Logging in the next morning and seeing updates from my team members, I'm encouraged to keep working on our collective passion project. (49 words)

— — —

Falafels. Construction Work. Wave-Particle Duality. These describe my train ride for two hours every Saturday to attend the Columbia Science Honors Program. One side of my brain ponders the inception of subway route-optimization while the other side empathizes with the little kid tugging on his mom's jacket for more candy. (50 words)

— — —

In July of 2018, I analyzed supersaturation in polymers, measuring their weight change, and combined my experiment with another researcher's nanoparticles project, investigating whether nano-patterned polymers more effectively filtered water. By expanding the experiment, results have the potential to provide clean water to developing countries and revolutionize current filtration techniques. (50 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Use the opportunity to flex a different value. Along with the opportunity to share an activity Yale hasn't seen yet comes the chance to show a different value. Do the [Values Exercise](#), if you haven't already, and examine the rest of your application. Which of your values aren't showing up or aren't coming through as much as you'd like? Either choose an activity that allows you to express that value best, or find a way to write about it to show that value with intention. The first example here shows curiosity and persistence. The second is sprinkled with humor and adventure, while the third has geeky pursuit-of-knowledge vibes.

Show how that activity or experience demonstrates one of your best qualities. Zero in on one particular moment or aspect of your activity or experience that shows a positive quality about you. Notice, we say SHOW. Don't just write what that quality is—help your reader visualize it. For example, the author of the first essay reveals a commitment to passion projects by sharing details about his #daily-progress posts. The author of the second essay talks about a train ride but shows an intellectual curiosity about the world around her. And the author of third essay talks about an academic research experience but demonstrates knowing how to apply scientific research to real world problems.

HOW TO WRITE THE YALE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #4

Applicants submitting the Coalition Application or Common Application will respond to one of the following prompts in 400 words or fewer.

- Yale carries out its mission “through the free exchange of ideas in an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.” Reflect on a time when you exchanged ideas about an important issue with someone holding an opposing view. How did the experience lead you either to change your opinion or to sharpen your reasons for holding onto it?

- Reflect on a time when you have worked to enhance a community to which you feel connected. Why have these efforts been meaningful to you? You may define community however you like.

Let's break that down ...

**Option 1: Yale carries out its mission “through the free exchange of ideas in an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.” Reflect on a time when you exchanged ideas about an important issue with someone holding an opposing view. How did the experience lead you either to change your opinion or to sharpen your reasons for holding onto it?
(400 words or fewer)**

There's no doubting it. Yale is one of the most intellectually rigorous communities in the world. And this essay prompt asks you to reflect on a moment that shows you welcome the growth that comes from weighing different viewpoints. Since this prompt is deeply connected to Yale's core values and mission, it's important to spend time and intention on your response.

Since this is a new prompt this year for Yale, we don't have an example written just for it. But here's a great example, written for a very similar Princeton prompt.

Example:

A racist culture pervades my small town of Maryville, Tennessee. To outsiders, we seem complicit in this racism through our mascot: the Rebels. In August, my school voted me as Mrs. MHS: awarded to the student who contributes the most to the school and community through extracurriculars, academics, and community service and embodies the “Rebel spirit.” I was grateful for the award, but appalled when the latter label was bestowed upon me. So, the girl who embodied the Rebel spirit rebelled.

“Whether you like it or not, our mascot has foundations in racism. Changing the mascot is the bare minimum that we owe to the students that have been affected by the racism this mascot fuels,” began my (now infamous) social media post.

My post was reposted, sent in groups, and met with intense hatred.

“The snowflakes won't let us have anything these days. It's literally a mascot,” read the most popular comment, insinuating that I was being overly sensitive. The student who wrote this, leader of a group called “Save the Rebels,” ensured that I was alienated as one of the few local supporters.

I messaged him and transformed an argumentative discourse into a healthy, multiple-day discussion about the roots and depiction of the mascot. We researched each other's sources and began to understand the opposing side's perspective. Yet, as we made progress, his friends pulled him away from breaking the barriers of polarization with me.

Incorporating the lessons I learned from this experience into future dialogues, I believe it would be increasingly impactful for the defenders of the mascot to hear the testimonials of students of color to substantiate my claim that the mascot brought about pain. I would also want to create a safe space where individuals can exchange differing perspectives and attempt to understand each other's position without fear of social pressure.

At Princeton, I hope to contribute to an environment free of judgment, where I can use the tools that I've gained to pave the way for a more effective, respectful dialogue.

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Find a unique angle. Never forget that your goal is to stand out and say something memorable when writing any college application essay. So, try not to choose to reflect on a moment that could have happened to anyone (e.g., arguing with someone in the comment section of a YouTube video). Instead, pick a moment that brings the reader into a unique angle of your life. Notice how the author of this example essay also gets to share information about her role as “Mrs. MHS.”

Weigh the opposing viewpoints. Show you're capable of analyzing both sides of an argument. You can do this by discussing your beliefs about the particular issue and then showing your process for attempting to understand the opposing viewpoint. The author of this example shows her commitment to understanding the other side by talking about how she not only reached out to discuss the issue with the leader of “Save the Rebels,” she and her conversation partner also took the time to research “each other's sources and began to understand the opposing side's perspective.

Share the lesson and how you plan to apply it. How did you grow from your experience? That's what Yale's admission officials really want to know. So, end your essay with a clear explanation of what you've learned from having your ideas challenged and the more nuanced understanding you now have of the issue. Then, wrap things up by discussing how you can continue

to apply the lessons you gained from the experience. This student devotes a whole paragraph on how she'd apply the lessons she's learned, exposing the defenders of the mascot to perspectives of those who've been hurt by it, but also creating a safe space for all to share their opinions. That's just the kind of maturity and self-reflection Yale (and Princeton) is looking for.

Here's another great example, also written for that Princeton prompt:

Example:

The past few years have demonstrated a rift between perspectives present throughout the nation, and my Spanish class perfectly demonstrated this. Once during a group discussion, someone shared a cartoon in which a certain elected official with a certain style of hair who lives in a certain house was drawn as an infant. This led to a heated argument.

Some of us found it relatively humorous, while others were offended, claiming the political caricature was a form of bullying. As the quarreling continued, the focus on the image waned. Insults were being thrown in broken Spanish and it soon became clear people weren't listening so much as forcing their beliefs and expecting agreement.

For a while, I just attributed this to differences of opinion. But once members of the group began avoiding each other, I noticed the resentment over who had or had not chuckled at the simply-drawn lines of the cartoon had led to another drawing: that of deep divisions between friends. There seemed to be a lack of ear-lending and little fact-based explanations shared as to why others were perceived as wrong.

When we revisited this incident in our next discussion, I realized education is different from indoctrination. Explaining something to demonstrate why a certain belief is not a fact is different from forcing someone to change their beliefs by belittling them. Though I considered myself a neutral party in this particular argument, I had taken a side internally. In the future, if I were to find myself in a similar situation, the first thing I would do is limit my bias by attempting to hear the rationale behind both sides before concluding that one is worse than the other.

— — —

Option 2: Reflect on a time when you have worked to enhance a community to which you feel connected. Why have these efforts been meaningful to you? You may define community however you like. (400 words or fewer)

This prompt is a slight variation on the standard Community Essay. You can read this [step-by-step guide \(with some great examples that we also analyze\) on that type of essay](#). Unlike the typical prompt that asks you to define a community you're a part of, this one goes an important step further by asking you to talk about how you've "worked to enhance" that community.

Here's a great example essay that does just that.

Example:

1-7-7-6.

The lock clicks and the rusty gate opens. I trudge through wormy mud in my rubber boots and twelve sheep turn around. Food?

Herding sheep while volunteering at Washington Crossing Historic Park let me consider what the animal world has to teach us. Collaboration is key to productivity: how else does one steal feed? But, in the presence of wealth, they adopt an unstated policy of "every sheep for themselves." And when an issue affects everyone—evaporating drinking water, withering pastures, muggy air—they become lethargic, unproductive, and powerless.

Sheep also feel the effects of climate change. But, unlike us, they have no control over their destiny, and have every right to feel despondent. We do have control—over our destiny and the destinies of nearly 9 million species.

Wanting to fulfill my obligation to at least some of those species, I got involved. I joined the Garden Apprenticeship Program and tended to our school's hens, and as a member of EnAct, I organized a state-wide climate change conference. Now, as a leader in my school's Service Learning committee, I connect my fellow students to their own passions. (186 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Show new sides of yourself that the reader hasn't seen elsewhere in your application. Use this essay to show another, deeper side of a previously mentioned community or (even better) to discuss a community you haven't had a chance to explore extensively. And, as we mentioned above, take advantage of the opportunity to express new values you haven't shared yet. Got a goofy side that hasn't been explored yet? Have fun with

the writing! Or maybe you've spent much of your space on academic work—then use this essay to show your love of family or free-spiritedness.

Try to think outside the box. Which of your communities might help you stand out among other such essays? Being part of a “community” can take a lot of different forms. Don't limit yourself to a narrow definition. Like talking about herding sheep—Yale may see lots of climate change essays here and in other prompts, but it's highly unlikely it's read one that views the issue through the animal kingdom's eyes quite like this one.

Discuss the impact of your contribution. This is an important aspect of this prompt, as we noted above, and what differentiates it from some other community essay prompts. It underscores how important it is to Yale admission officers that they set a sense for how you've contributed to your chosen community and why that contribution matters to you. This student talks about how they got involved—by tending to the school's hens as a member of the Garden Apprenticeship Program and organizing a statewide climate change conference—but because this essay was written for another prompt, they didn't emphasize why that involvement mattered as expressly as they would have if writing to this prompt. Make sure to do both.

Details! Be specific. The more visceral details you can give about yourself and the community you're discussing, the more you distinguish yourself from all the other applicants. Use memorable language and evoke unique images that will stick with the admission officers. Like this, which makes for a fun opening: “1-7-7-6. The lock clicks and the rusty gate opens. I trudge through wormy mud in my rubber boots and twelve sheep turn around. *Food?*”

Here's a bonus example that also works well (and makes that “why the efforts have been meaningful” point even stronger).

Example:

“Well, they seem like normal people, I guess.” Putting down his phone, my dad conceded.

How much this moment means to me is difficult to describe.

As a volunteer at the Beijing LGBT Center, I'd shot and edited a video entitled “I Don't Want to Work in the Closet”, exposing the discrimination queer Chinese employees face in workplaces. Aiming to raise funds for the center and create reverberation among employers, I scrutinized every detail in my video, from the subtitle fonts to the background music. Reorganizing the clips, I created an emotional arc providing a call for action. The video was eventually published on

Chinese social media. As the number of views rose and supportive comments emerged, I was proud to have made an impact.

But I didn't feel the weight of my contribution until I showed the video to my dad, who, despite his love for me, was unaware of my queer identity, largely disdained my work at the center and (as far as I know) the entire LGBT population.

Now, my dad's comment let me know the video had altered his perception, even if just slightly. Using my directing and video-editing skills, I was able to help humanize the Chinese queer population. My dad is far from being supportive of the LGBT movement, as are many other Chinese people, but fostering a willingness to accept differences was already a significant step.

I produce videos to magnify the underrepresented voice of my LGBTQ community because, to me, diversity matters.