

NARRATIVE COLLEGE ESSAY SAMPLES

STUDENT EXAMPLE #1

Lying rather uncomfortably on the examination table while facing the painfully bright ceiling lights, I fidgeted nervously, desperately trying to ignore the gloominess of the situation. I attempted to focus on staying warm in the bitterly cold room, but the events of just a few months prior kept running through my head—the intense pain, my overwhelming fear, and the frantic scrambling of surgeons and nurses in the Emergency Room. The doctors told me I had broken a vertebra in my lower back. Briefly, I now smiled thinking about the innocence of my response to the news: “So I have to wear a brace now when I play football?”

Waiting for the doctor now, I became unbearably impatient. I had waited for three months to find out whether or not I would be cleared to play football again, but the thought of waiting another five minutes seemed impossible. Then Dr. Pittinger entered the room. He was friendly, but perceptibly uncomfortable, almost sad. The question remained unasked and unanswered as we went through the standard procedures of a physical and I could tell that I had cleared all of the tests. The time had finally come for him to tell me whether or not I could play. His eyes focused on his clipboard for a moment, and he then lifted his head, frowning. He spoke slowly and softly, but still rather matter-of-factly, as he told me that I would never be able to play football again.

The realization sunk in immediately. I wasn't surprised, or at least I shouldn't have been, but that did not make the order any easier. I refuted the idea wholeheartedly, and for months after I was released, I continued to condition with the football team in hopes of returning the next year. I woke up every morning at five to be at the gym by six for rehab. Even though I was ashamed to wear my back brace, I wore it devotedly, with some sort of false hope that the more I wore it, the quicker and better it would heal the broken vertebrae. At night, I slept on the floor because my bone doctor told me that sleeping on a firm surface was good for my back.

I was determined to play again.

Nonetheless, in the end, just as the doctor ordered, I never played another quarter of football. After several nights in a row of coming home from conditioning barely able to walk, I finally gave in. For a while, giving up felt like an admittance of defeat rather than the acceptance of a truth that should have been painfully obvious, but over time, I realized that like most of the difficult decisions I have made and will have to make, life would go on. Rather than focus on what was undeniably unattainable, I understood that even though this particular option was no longer open to me, I had countless other choices to make in its place.

STUDENT EXAMPLE #2

I punched in 3-7-5-2 and hit ‘Send.’ An electric motor gave a muffled buzz, and the door clanked and hinged until it was overhead. From the dim opening, the smell of gasoline, motor oil, and lacquer thinner slowly escaped. I smiled. Carefully stepping over a few stacks of cardboard boxes and ducking below the bumper that hung from the rafters, I reached the switch. After a short pause, a noisy fluorescent bulb flickered and then illuminated the garage. My heart beat a little faster. I stood there for a moment and took the whole scene in. The garage was in complete disorder, but I can’t say I was surprised; I’d known its owner long enough to expect that. I counted four engine stands. A greasy push rod V8 sat atop the one nearest to where I was standing. A faded badge on the valve cover gave away its identity as a Buick 400. On another rested a supercharged Pontiac 3800. Probably from the Bonneville sitting outside, I thought. The other two stands had covers over whatever formidable power plants occupied them. I glanced over a few sets of cylinder heads and five complete sets of Buick rallies on my way to the other light switch, which was hidden behind a dusty sand blaster.

Another hesitant fluorescent bulb lit up the far side of the building, the side I hadn’t seen before. In contrast to the mess of automotive parts behind me, this side was organized and clean. Next to the wall sat the diamond in the rough. I looked down the side of the beautiful machine. Not a scratch, a dent, or even a

hint of orange peel. The black convertible top was almost as shiny as the aquamarine steel that it was attached to. Over the smells of various fossil fuels, I sniffed a trace of Armor-All. The chrome emblems still had the mirror finish, but I already knew what I was admiring. Skylark Convertible, I thought to myself, sixty-eight or sixty-nine.

I heard my hood latch release. I emerged from the wonderful world that is a gearhead's garage. Compared to the beauty I had just seen, my car looked like it was ready for City Scrap. I stole a glance down the body. The deep scratch from the air compressor and the sizable dent from my dad's car made me cringe. I peered under the hood to find that he already had my fifteen-dollar chrome air cleaner off and was adjusting the old Quadrajet. I looked with envy at the shiny Holley that sat on a shelf to my left. I had been wanting to replace my carburetor for a while, but I couldn't justify the cost. My car was running well enough. It idled roughly, and like a spoiled child, refused to move if it thought it was too cold outside of the garage. My car came alive. He started whistling to himself as he checked the timing. We talked about my car, his car, his friend's car, cruise-ins, and drag strip nights. For a while I think he even forgot that I was dating his daughter. As the mid-day heat was just starting to bake the driveway, I filled the oil pan with fresh Mobil One and the tune-up was finished. I swung open one of the big red doors, sat down on a square of beige carpet that covered the tear in the seat, and turned the key. The small block started without complaint. Even with brand new oil, I was annoyed when I heard the old rocker knock still ticking under the hood. This is quite common in Buick engines of the sixties and seventies; Buick couldn't seem to make an adequate oiling system. I started thinking about ways to improve the oiling system. My train of thought shifted a few times, and before long I had a prototype for a completely revolutionized internal combustion engine rotating on an engine stand in my brain.

“So, have you thought about what you want to go to school for?”

Yanked back to reality, It took a moment for me to comprehend the question. I had been asked it many times before, and I never had a confident answer. At that moment, though, I felt as though I had a fairly solid grasp on it.

“Right now, it's looking like mechanical engineering.”

He nodded, seemingly impressed. I was certainly more impressed than he was. I'd never really come to a conclusion on a college major, but after a few hours under the hood, I felt like I knew what I wanted to do. As I drove my delightfully smooth-running '71 Buick Skylark home, I began to envision my future as a mechanical engineer.

STUDENT EXAMPLE #3

“You’re not important, you’re not important, and you’re not important.” The words tumbled from my lips as I pointed to Andrew, the nerdy kid with glasses, Jason, the wannabe-skater boy, and Randy, the lanky guy with buck teeth. “I just need to ask Billy a few questions for this survey,” I continued, pushing haughtily through the group as I searched for their leader, my friend Billy. As I questioned Billy, I saw some boys dribbling a soccer ball around the football field and I heard the giddy buzz of the girls’ conversations. Jason, Randy, and Andrew leaned against the metal chain-link fence, almost in a daze under the glare of the mid-May sun. After I finished chatting with Billy, I jauntily walked away without another glance at the rejects that he called his friends.

Many months after I had forgotten the events of that day, I somehow developed a crush on the wannabe-skater, Jason. When Jason finally asked me to be his girlfriend, I was ambivalent to the possibility of dating a guy who spiked his hair with blue gel, played the guitar, and wore Army-green camouflage pants. Sure, I loved his sharp-witted humor, his zany antics, and his compassionate ways, but our common interests were minimal and our social statuses virtually never crossed. Reluctantly, I accepted Jason’s offer on the condition that no one, save our close friends, would suspect that we were together. After imparting the news of what seemed like an illicit relationship to our friends, Jason and I discussed their unique reactions. Jason delicately explained that Andrew was less than thrilled. Fortunately, I read through

Jason's euphemisms and recognized that Andrew abhorred me. Since I could not imagine what atrocious thing I had said or done to arouse such antagonism, I asked Jason to enlighten me.

"Dani, don't you remember that day last year when you came over to us and asked to talk to Billy? Do you remember not talking to the rest of us and telling us that we weren't important?"

Jason inquired. Suddenly I felt as if my heart had dropped to the very pit of my stomach—I clearly remembered that day, but I never once considered the effect I had on Jason and his friends.

Immediately, I began to realize that if Andrew remembered my disdainful words, Randy, Jason, and anyone that I ever ridiculed probably remembered my taunting as well. But why had I teased and mocked my peers? What horrendous things had they done to me? I laughed at Randy, Andrew, Jason, and others because they were different from me; they were unusual and dorky; they were enigmas to me. As I contemplated my words, I saw that my statements were completely unfounded. Day by day, Jason and his friends became increasingly important to me—I came to understand that they were amazing people whose company I enjoyed immensely. Once I was completely aware of my misconception of Randy, Andrew, and Jason, I knew that I must have made numerous other fallacies.

After thinking about my past, I attempted to calculate the number of potential friends I had lost as a result of thoughtlessly judging people. The exact figure was impossible to determine, but I knew it was enormous. I realized that if I continued to act in this manner, I might miss the opportunity to develop friendships with incredible people, so I finally decided to make a conscious effort to think carefully about how I treat others, to choose my words prudently, and to be more accepting of others' differences.

Today, almost four years later, I can see a distinctive change in myself. Instead of mocking people for their unique traits, I embrace the diversity of people and am grateful that I have the opportunity to know and encounter a limitless spectrum of people. Most importantly, I have learned the true meaning of equality among people; I now am able to accept that I am neither above nor below any other human being. I believe that I am now a tremendously tolerant and open-minded person.

STUDENT EXAMPLE #4

As I opened the giant doors the sun pierced my eyes, forcing me to squint just to make sense of the parking lot. It was a hot day, almost 90 degrees, but it still felt cool compared to the smoldering 110 degrees of my work station. I tried to look down the seemingly endless rows of cars, shielding my eyes from the tremendous glare that reflected off the windshields. I had blocked the sun with mild success, but my vision had become blurry from the sweat dripping into my eyes. It felt like I had been swimming in the ocean with my eyes open all day, and based on my appearance an observer would have thought I had done this in my clothes. I tried rubbing my eyes with my t-shirt to remove the burning saltiness, but since my shirt was soaked through, my actions only intensified the pain. After a few moments I was finally able to make sense of the parking lot and I began my trek toward my car.

Unfortunately Lincoln Electric has a parking lot that would rival most major amusement parks. It wouldn't be a problem if I were an executive or an actual employee, but welding school students had reserved parking at the very back of the lot, three quarters of a mile from the building. I had been walking for what felt like an eternity, yet I didn't feel any closer to my car because of the stifling heat that I could see and feel. Eventually I saw my jeep through the thick haze, which was what I needed to reassure myself that this parking lot did end and that it didn't just fade into the horizon. When I finally arrived at my car I hesitantly got in.

Fatigue had consumed my body, and any excitement I felt about leaving was dampened because I knew I would have to return early the next morning.

Becoming a welder, I am convinced, is one of the hardest things any 18-year-old can do. My summer of factory work and school was the best and worst experience of my life. I learned more about life in 90 days than I had learned in the past 18 years, though this did not come easily. While my friends were sleeping, at 6:45, I was showered and dressed. I often wanted to call in sick and just catch up on all my sleep, and at times, I couldn't see the benefit in going to work, especially when I looked at my arms and examined the burns on them. By this point my protective leathers had become worn and the molten metal spitting from the arc had begun to burn my skin. Yet, these days when I didn't want to work were the days when I learned the most. Between the long car rides and almost endless walks I realized what was happening. If the summer taught me anything it taught me what I didn't want to be, and what I have to do to ensure this. School, for example, has now become more important than it had ever been before.

My newfound appreciation for education alone was worth the grueling experience, but welding gave me so much more. My whole life I had fit in, but on the first day of work I was the outsider. Not only had I not had any welding experience, but I also had not been exposed to factory life on that level. I had no idea what it was like to be up every morning before dawn, and I had no idea what manual labor was all about. In previous summers, I worked as a landscaper, but even the challenges I experienced then paled in comparison to true blue-collar work. Fortunately the other employees at Lincoln Electric didn't know of my sheltered work experience. Generally, to factory workers, kids like me had no business being in the shop. These men knew what it was like to work in order to eat. They knew that the company depended on their output, though often times their pay didn't represent their importance. To them kids like me didn't have any idea what it is like to walk in their shoes. After my experiences there, I would have to agree. I had no idea about the commitment, dedication and perseverance it takes to show up for factory work everyday.

By the end of the summer I learned what welding was all about. It is not about “gluing” metal together, it is about the pride and the bonds you form with your partners. It’s about being able to look at your partner, not saying a word, and knowing what they’re going through. Its about the pride we take knowing that without us ships would sink, pipes wouldn’t fit, and bridges would crumble. One summer of welding changed my life. I experienced something most people never will. I went from being the outsider to one of the guys. The intangible lessons welding has taught me couldn’t possibly be matched by any high school, and for these reasons and because of these experiences, I am proud to call myself a certified welder.