

Personal Statement Examples

1. Give Goth a Chance

When I sat down to write this essay, I tried, as my high school English teacher always instructed, to imagine the audience for my writing. The more I thought about it, the more I pitied the college admissions screeners who would be reading a thousand essays on diversity. Along with the expected takes on race and ethnicity, how many of those essays would present their authors as outcasts, loners, kids who didn't fit in at his or her school? How could I present myself as someone unique and interesting—strange, even—without falling prey to the cliché of the self-pitying social misfit?

Let me be direct: in some ways, I am the antithesis of what one might picture as a student who contributes to campus diversity. I am white, middle-class, and heterosexual; I have no physical handicaps or mental challenges apart from a tendency towards sarcasm. But when I receive college brochures picturing smiling, clean-cut teens dressed in the latest from Abercrombie & Fitch and lounging on a blanket in the sun, I think, *those people are not like me.*

Simply put, I am a Goth. I wear black, lots of it. I have piercings and ear gauges and tattoos. My hair, naturally the same sandy blonde that the rest of my family shares, is dyed jet, sometimes highlighted in streaks of purple or scarlet. I rarely smile, and I don't do sun. If I were inserted into those brochure photographs of typical college students, I would look like a vampire stalking her wholesome prey.

Again, I am imagining my reading audience, and I can almost see my readers' eyes roll. *So you're a little weird, kid. How does that contribute to campus diversity?* Well, I think I contribute plenty. Diversity goes beyond the physical; race or ethnicity might be the first things one thinks of, but really, it is a question of what makes someone the person that he or she is. Diversity might be considered in terms of economic or geographical background, life experiences, religion, sexual orientation, and even personal interests and general outlook. In this respect, my Goth identity contributes a perspective that is far different from the mainstream. Being Goth isn't just about physical appearance; it's a way of life that, like any other, includes not only individual tastes in music, literature, and popular culture, but also particular beliefs about philosophy, spirituality, and a range of other human issues.

To give just one specific example, I am planning to major in Environmental Studies, and while it might seem odd to picture a ghoulishly-dressed girl who adores the natural world, it was my Goth outlook that led me to this academic interest. I read voraciously, and am drawn to subject matter that is somewhat dark; the more I read about humanity's impact on the planet and the near-apocalyptic dangers posed by global climate change, pollution, overpopulation, the manipulation of the food supply and other environmental threats, the more interested I became, and the more determined that I should become involved. I, along with other members of my school's Environmental Club, started a campus recycling program, and lobbied our superintendent to install in all classrooms power strips that are used to easily shut down equipment such as printers and computers at the end of the day, thereby conserving energy and generating significant savings for our school. I was drawn to this dark subject matter of environmental crisis, not to wallow in it or savor the Schadenfreude, but to change it and make the world a better place.

I know Goths look a little funny, as we wear our ebony trenchcoats in seventy-degree weather. I know we seem a little odd as we gather in shady nooks to discuss the latest episode of *True Blood*. I know professors may sigh as we swell the enrollments of poetry and art classes. Yes, we're different. And we—I—have a lot to contribute.

2. Harmony through Chaos

With convention comes conformity; with conformity comes the fall of the individual. Individual beliefs and ideals, however, are vital to the very basis of the society we as humans thrive in. Simply conforming leads to a backwards society in which a few hold power and the rest are subjugated, but people hate being subjugated: they just want to be free. This is the reason that people search for meaning in their lives; it is the reason that people are diverse in both intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. It is this very diversity that not only defines us but also allows us to find a place in the world. Where am I in all of this? I am an individual who is defined by my experiences in both the eastern and western worlds.

The east is a mysterious world that has opened my eyes to a plethora of knowledge regarding the society, culture, life and so much more. I have been training in Shotokan karate, a form of Japanese martial arts, since 1999. In this discipline, I have been taught that the sensei, the teacher, was the master of all knowledge. With each day of training, every drop of sweat, with every kick, every punch, a sense knowledge was passed on from sensei to student. It was this initial spark that led me to the Japanese culture. I was fascinated by the blind obedience, intrigued by bushidō, the way of the warrior: the sense of purpose in each individual who lived by it to protect and live with honor until death.

Countercurrent to this experience, are my experiences in the western world. It was in the western world where the crusades began, where Martin Luther blatantly defied an authority, where Galileo Galilei was excommunicated for refuting the theocracy, where new nations formed that would eventually influence the course of humanity. It is in this western world that I have been educated and have been led to think on an individual basis rather than a utilitarian one that is common in eastern cultures. During my rigors in AP European History, I interpreted the works of philosophers. From Plato to Aquinas, from Ockham to Descartes, from Kant to Nietzsche, I absorbed and integrated these philosophies to my own being, and also developed a bad habit of reading philosophy.

It was in my pursuit of knowledge and experience that I began to learn about the virtues and follies of humanity, the reason behind wars, and the impetus to live. I have realized that only by mixing the cultures of the eastern and western worlds can true harmony of diversity be achieved. Trying to attain this harmony is parallel to what Dr. William G. Ouchi, author and professor, attempted to do in the field of business management in mixing eastern and western management practices into a hybrid business management system. Assimilating the cultures and lessons of both, the eastern and western worlds, allows me to be more in balance with myself and the external world.

In connecting to the overall theme of cross-cultures, I am an adolescent of Bengali descent, but beyond that I am an individual shaped by the constant clash of different cultures and influences. It is in a chaotic system I was born into, and in this chaotic system I thrive.

3. The Bitter and the Sweet

The candy's smooth wrapper crinkles as I trace its edges with my fingertips, imagining its contents. The wrapper tears like a fine fabric, revealing a corner of dark chocolate. I break off a piece and take pleasure in its creamy essence. I have always had a sweet tooth, but it is not just sugary snacks that I crave. Being raised by a single parent has been a bittersweet experience, but one that has given me resilience and ambition.

When I was young, my mother would tell me that the racks of candy in the store's checkout line belonged to the cashier. She said this not to confuse me, avoid spoiling me, or even to teach me a lesson about earning rewards, though she inevitably did. She said it because she didn't want me to worry because she could not afford a 50-cent chocolate bar. Nevertheless, I saw through her tactic and made a promise to myself that I would grow up to be prosperous enough to buy my family all the Hersheys on the stand.

Instead of focusing on our economic instability, my mother selflessly pushed me to strive for success so that I could lead a more comfortable life than hers. She worked long hours every night and struggled to pay the minimum due on her bills. Still, she would find time to read and snuggle with my sister, Emily, and me. Mom taught me the value of perseverance, education, and moral fiber. Although I did not have two parents, I was loved and nurtured just as much.

Not all of life's milestones were easy; some left an insurmountably bitter taste in my mouth. Domestic abuse, divorce, and homelessness, for example. I dealt with these when my mother married a man in Maryland and moved us several states away from our roots in Georgia. The first few months were great: baseball games, family trips to the mall, dinners together, and movies. It felt like we were the perfect All-American family. Then things changed. Baseball games were too expensive, and trips to the mall were replaced with days Emily and I spent isolated in our rooms on his orders. Screaming matches between my stepfather and my mother interrupted dinners, and he swapped movie tickets for vodka.

We spent five years living in a family setting that had turned into a war zone. I remember the verbal spats became so routine that I would no longer rush to my little sister's room to cradle her in my arms and wipe away the tears spilling down her cheeks. Emily and I grew so used to this lifestyle that we just turned on the televisions in our rooms to drown out the screams. We became immersed in the world of sugar-coated sitcoms, pretending the spiteful cursing matches downstairs were normal.

Then one evening, an argument erupted. My sister and I had begun to predict the start of these altercations. We called our system ETF, Estimated Time of Fight, named for its accuracy. Emily joked about patenting it some day. But on this night my mother swung open my bedroom door and told me to pack – we were leaving and not coming back. I could hear Emily sobbing in her room.

We loaded our things into Mom's Ford, my stepfather barking hatefully all the while. We drove for a long time before Mom pulled into the parking lot of a large store. I gazed out the window, watching people carry bags to their cars and head off to their warm homes. They were oblivious to our bittersweet tears. They had no idea how relieved and traumatized we felt, all at the same time. I was 14, my sister 11, school was still in session, and we were homeless.

"We're not the first people to go through this, and we won't be the last," Mom assured us.

A friend of my mother's let us stay with her. Each day, Mom would wake us before dawn so we could commute from Virginia to Maryland for our last three months of school. I remember looking out at the gleaming Washington Monument from the Potomac bridge, wondering how many others in the nation had suffered in silence. How many had packed up and moved on?

We eventually relocated to Texas, where Mom is still working to re-stabilize her life. And now, as I compose this essay with some dark chocolate – my favorite candy – close at hand, I realize my family and I are at the best point in our lives. I have triumphed here, both academically and personally. I satiate my hunger for knowledge by remaining dedicated to my intellectual pursuits – for example, the Distinguished Graduation Plan with its rigorous course of study and community service, and the learning opportunities it offers.

I savor the fact that I am not a bitter product of my environment; I am not a person who lets trying times interrupt her focus, for I know that they are learning experiences also. Success, like candy, can be the sweetest treat of all.

4. An Identity

In my life, I have been fortunate enough to not have any life changing tragedies, but I've had one certain life long situation that has shaped the person I am today.

Ever since I can remember I have felt like the oddball of my family. I have been the kid with no art skills, poor academics, and a struggle with weight. I was, and still am, different than my family. My dad is an accomplished poet and creative writer, my mom is multi-lingual in four languages and a linguistic expert for our local university, my sister is a national award winning ceramicist, and my brother is an accomplished carpenter and illustrator. I, on the other hand, am completely the opposite. Other than fine penmanship, I can't write a poem, speak another language properly, create a decorative pot, or draw a decent picture.

My physical image has always been compared to that of my brother and sister; twins, who are lean, skinny, and fit. I had gone through a "fat" stage when having gained a total of 20-25 pounds when I was fifteen. My sister is petite and 5'2, while I am 5'7 and distinctly the contrary to petite. At family functions, I could hear my aunts talking about me at the next table. I could hear them snickering, saying that I should be the big sister rather than the little sister. They would also make judgments about my pale white skin, suggesting I should be darker or tanned like them. The constancy of hearing them put me down would literally tear me up mentally. I would leave family gatherings with those voices of criticism, relentlessly regretting the way I looked, wishing to have my sister's perfect physique.

As an aspiring academic, I have had to consistently work hard on keeping my G.P.A decent, "average"; despondent of my inability to be like the twins, full-time honor students with GPA's of 3.8 and 4.2. I have let this one situation, a comparison of "they" as a success story and "me" as a classic failure," to control my life. I have wasted so much time and effort feeling sorry for myself for not being like my family. I know this year opened my eyes to the person I truly am.

I have learned of the passion I hold for the study of Human Behavior and Science; and, of the outstanding AVID tutor I have become. To be the first in my family to pursue the field of Human Science, and to tutor AVID students, is a valuable part of my identity, something that I don't have to share nor compare to my family. I have not lived as long as my mom, dad, or the twins, so maybe I haven't found what exactly I'm good at or what I can proudly accomplish. I think whatever "it" is will come to me when it does, and when that time comes, I won't focus on the negative aspects. But, rather, on the strength of experience and the power to move forward. Most importantly, I won't compare myself to my family, because it is the distinction and peculiarity of each individual that allows progress to be made and character to take on new meaning. The necessity, then, needs to be in shifting and transforming while encapsulating a timeless tradition of gaining self-identity.