
Escaping the Numbers: College Admission Essay Sample

I am a quantitative entity. Throughout my entire life, I have been defined by a set of numbers. From the number on my birth certificate to the grade I got on a math test this week, they have always represented me...well, a watered-down, inhuman version of me. Growing up being labeled “gifted and talented” made my numerical “importance” evident to me at a young age. From first grade I knew my IQ (145), my percentile on standardized tests (usually 99th), and a multitude of other statistics. From fourth through tenth grade, I had a different gifted teacher every year. While their varied approaches to enriching our schooling gave me interesting insight, having no stability in my special education programs in some of my most fundamental years was detrimental in coming to know myself as a student and understanding my limitations—or that I had any. I had to be the best at everything. I had to impress everyone.

My county’s school system claims to emphasize the value of individuals’ talents, but this is far from true in practice. The students at my school are in constant competition with ourselves, our classmates, and other bubble-fillers throughout the nation. I would like to imagine that my numbers do not matter, and that every single grade will not have detrimental repercussions, but that is the mind frame which I have been classically conditioned to accept. Grades are the most important. Scores are everything. Our numbers reflect on our teachers’ ability, our state’s vigilance, and our natural intelligence, but mostly, the content of our character and our very souls. At least, that’s how we’re made to feel. When I research colleges, the first thing that they want to know is my numerical value. My peers and I are all focused on raising our ACT scores (32). When I study for a test, I motivate myself by remembering my class rank (13), and will spend hours not focused on learning, but on scoring well in order to raise my GPA (4.39).

But every day when the final bell rings (2:37), I forget all of that. I spend three hours a day marching miles and miles and miles and never leaving a 50-yard radius, playing the same twelve notes in different combinations and octaves over and over and overs as I try to perfect something incredibly strange, but strangely incredible. I look forward to each grueling, exhausting minute of practice because it lets me *feel*. The very nature of music allows no other option. Band has always been my escape from the numbers, although, ironically, we count for hours at time, each set on the field is numbered (1-85) and even my body is labeled with a number in the drill (C2). When I am in band, I am a valuable individual in flesh, not merely in a computer. I am part of a microcosm of life—an organic art form expressed on a football field, of all places. My creative outlet is structured. I make the minutest changes to the angle of my chin, the millisecond at which my feet hit the ground, and the accuracy of my fingers. Each apparently insignificant thing that I do matters. It’s peculiar that such a confidence-driven experience can also be immensely humbling.

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In band, I am good at everything, but the best at nothing. I can always improve, and there is always someone better than me. I learned that "Practice makes progress." It is important to always progress forward, but it is okay to accept that perfection is not attainable. I am allowed to focus on the intimate details, not just on finding the right answers. I control myself, and everything I do has a repercussion. I am able to perfect my craft in a way that school has never allowed me to do. Band frees me from my prison of numbers, one 8-count move at a time.

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