



C a l t e c h

- Accepted College Essay -

MUSIC FROM THE HEART

The greatest joy of music is to share it with others. Unfortunately, the pleasure of performing is often forgotten when players become more concerned with the technicalities and notes. I also once thought that I knew all the important keys to successful piano playing: practice, technique, dedication, and a love for what I do. Focused on the details, I lost sight of my audience.

During my sophomore year, my friend invited me to join “Music from the Heart,” a group that showcased its musical talents to senior citizens. Although I accepted the invitation to support her, I began to regret my choice as the first performance approached. Not knowing how the seniors would respond to my performance, especially when I made a mistake, performing before the seniors became a terrifying thought.

Although my first performance went smoothly, it was hard to know whether the seniors enjoyed the pieces or the performance. While the group performed, the seniors would talk to each other, pausing to clap at the end of each piece. Trying to impress the audience, I eventually grew accustomed to preparing a showy piece as the monthly performance approached.

So used to this monthly routine, I doubted that this performance would be different from the previous ones when I was ready to perform my favorite piece one summer day. While waiting for my turn, I glanced around the room, noting with some uneasiness the growing number of seniors gathered around the piano. Amidst the crowd of chattering seniors, one woman’s rapt attention to the performance caught my interest. She greeted each performer with a wide toothy smile and made a small comment about the composition. Uncertain of her expectations, I watched for her reaction when I rose to introduce my piece, “Clair de Lune” by Claude Debussy.

“Ooh, I love that song,” was all she said in response.

A smile crossed my face when I discovered that she shared my enthusiasm for the composition. To demonstrate to her how much I enjoyed the song, I played my best to convey what made this moonlight song so special to me. My minor concerns on technicalities slowly dissipated as the song progressed. All that mattered then was playing the song I loved as well as I could. For the first time, I felt contented with my performance, undisturbed by mistakes.

The performance was far from perfect. However, none of the seniors commented that the rhythm was too slow or the notes were wrong like the audition judges would normally do. Although they still chattered softly during the performance, they all smiled and clapped. A few of them would say that the song was lovely. They appreciated my efforts to entertain them and eagerly asked the group to return soon. Just the delighted smile on the woman’s face made the performance worthwhile.

It was the seniors’ appreciation for what I did that brought them back to the piano each month, and my love for what I did that drew me to it. The monthly performance was not just a musical showcase; it was my chance to give back to the community and to help enrich the seniors’ life. The true joy in my life is not just sharing music, but devoting myself to community services as a volunteer.

INSPIRATION FROM AN ENERGY CONVERSION MACHINE

Everyone knows that it takes both hard work and a good understanding of the subject in order to complete a project. However, I never appreciated the other academic strengths and personal qualities needed until my 11th grade physics final. The task was to create an energy conversion machine that would undergo a minimum of five energy conversions. The construction of the machine piqued my interest in pursuing an engineering career and later became the pivotal factor in my decision to apply to Caltech.

I knew from the beginning that it would be a challenge to complete just the minimum requirements for the project. Believing that my teammates and I had the ability and potential to do better, as the team leader, I made it our goal to cover the conversions of all eight energy types that were taught in class. I also strived to add into the machine a bonus feature of breaking an egg. Struggling to find a solution for breaking the egg, I reflected upon the force of gravity we had learned. This idea led to a trap-door mechanism that would allow the egg to fall under gravity and break upon impact.

In addition to excelling in math and the sciences, I am also a strong visual art student. Enjoying drawing and designing, I gained a different perspective that I may not have had as just a science student. The creativity and imagination from the visual arts allowed me to use toilet paper rolls, Styrofoam, and Popsicle sticks as the primary materials to construct the machine in a limited space within limited time. Together with good planning, coordination, and the ability to work in a team, my innovative perspective from visual arts made this project a success.

On the due date, I watched with a prideful glee as the machine operated smoothly. For going beyond the minimum requirements, the machine was very well received. Beyond earning an excellent grade, the challenge of completing this project intrigued my increasing interest in engineering. My expectations and goals as a future college student were also evolved during the process.

Certain that I wanted to become a professional in the engineering field, I began searching for a college that would provide me with an excellent academic and hands-on experience. While I knew that Caltech is a prestigious science and engineering school, it wasn't until I received the Caltech Signature Award that I developed a stronger interest in becoming a Techer. Upon further research, I realized that Caltech is the college for me.

At Caltech, my engineering aspirations will be realized in this challenging, research-integrated environment. The rigorous coursework and the generous research opportunities at Caltech will provide the challenge I need to achieve my goal of becoming an engineer. In return, I believe the combination of my academic strength and creative personal characteristics will definitely contribute to Caltech and help to add to the interdisciplinary atmosphere of the school.

It takes more than just hard work to succeed as an engineering professional. However, it can be achieved with the outstanding educational opportunity at Caltech and with my other academic strengths and personal qualities.

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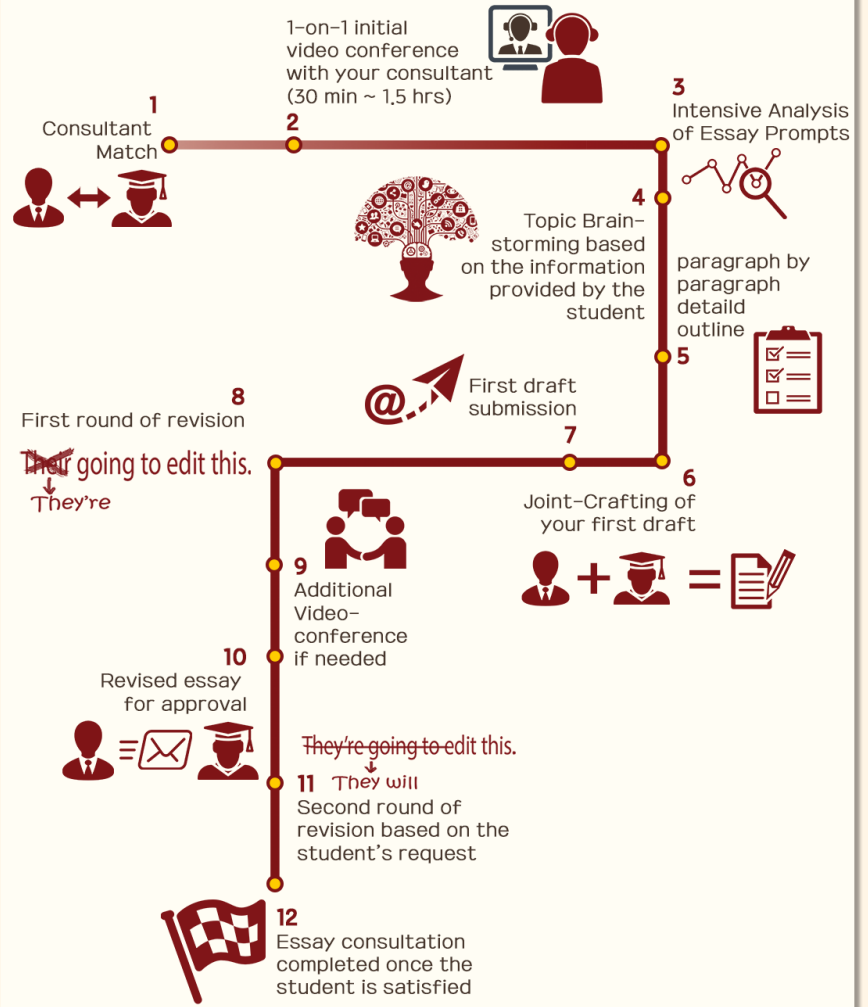
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