

Stanford Admission's Officer Erin Andrews made some videos about the admissions process that I wish I had known before writing my applications blindly. You can view the videos here:

Case 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSRxfV5aphw>

Case 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldiuv7aPymo>

Case 3: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy30oJ3BvqY>

Case 4: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzOgnHi5cnA>

Case 5: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81Mb1n-hYK4>

Case 6: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81Mb1n-hYK4>

I gather from these videos that there are two factors that go into your application:

The first is competitiveness and this is what warrants an admissions officer to look at the rest of your application. IT IS NOT WHAT GETS YOU IN. Competitiveness includes your GPA, your SAT scores, and the difficulty of the classes you've taken. Your GPA should be in the 3.8 range, which means somewhere between 3.6 and 4.0 for a top university. Your SAT scores, she mentions, should be around 2140, and I guess the honors program takes care of the difficulty. While I did have a 4.0 GPA, my SAT scores were horrible for Stanford standards. They were around 1800 which is way too low. However, for some reason I got in and I think it is because I did very good on the second factor of the admissions decision. The second and deciding factor of the admissions process is compellingness. Compellingness is comprised of your essays, your activities, and type of classes you've taken. They want to see you take a leadership role but it doesn't seem that important to have a bunch of them. What is important is that you frame your application around one or two subjects and that they seem related. Many people think universities want them to be good at everything and try to show a diversity of accomplishments and activities. However, if you think financially, universities want to create successful graduates—experts. It is good to be a jack of all trades but it is more important to be a master of ONE. So find your specialty and stick with it. When you do volunteer work, don't just do random volunteer work, try to find something that relates to your specialty. The same goes for your club activities and classes. If you're an environmentalist, volunteer for beach clean-ups, become president of a club for environmental activists, and take some classes in that you learn about sustainability. Also, try to show them, you're a good fit for their university. I want to research gender psychology and Stanford has a whole gender research institute. Mentioning gender in my writing supplement was a smart move. I think the most important part of your application is the essay portion and here is where you can pull it all together and explain how it is related. I think I wrote some pretty good essays and that's what helped me overcome that pesky SAT score.

## Common App Writing Portion

### Personal Essay

**Please provide a statement that addresses your reasons for transferring and the objectives you hope to achieve. You can type directly into the box, or you can paste text from another source. If pasting your essay creates problems with formatting, try first transferring your essay into a text editor such as Notepad (Windows) or TextEdit (Mac) before pasting into the application. (250-650 words)**

**Comment [P1]:** This and the following essay goes to all the institutions you apply to through the common app. Try to write essays that appeal to all of your transfer schools. For example, when I first wrote this essays I used the word "Ivy League" but when I later decided to apply to Stanford, I changed that to "elite institution" since Stanford is not officially one of the 8 Ivy League schools.

Achieving highly, obtaining status, accumulating abstract monetary value—society glorifies this combination as the ultimate aim of existence and yet, there is no greater waste of intellectual and creative capacity. One day, one’s name will fade from the collective mind and that green paper will dissolve into dust. I desire to have a more meaningful existence. **It is art, it is philosophy, and it is science** which will leave a footprint in the sand of time. Money and power are little more than means with which to attain greatness. The most paramount basis of my endeavor is education. Throughout my life I have come to realize the importance of education and I strive to transfer to the most educationally conducive institution and conduct research.

**Comment [P2]:** Elite institutions want students that have a desire to change or be an active part of their community.

**I always knew I was gifted, but I took it for granted.** Two years ago, I would have never even considered applying to an elite institution, let alone attending one. Two years ago, I just wanted to get an education—any education. This dramatically changed during the spring semester of 2013. I was fortunate to have stumbled into Mrs. Starla Lewis’ communication class. The first time I saw this inspiring and nurturing person, she stepped inside the classroom with a warm smile on her face and said in a soothing but uplifting voice, “Hotep! Peace, love, blessings, and prosperity!” I knew right then and there I had come to the right place.

**Comment [P3]:** This introductory sentence gets repeated to give a structural rhythm and a red string for the composition.

I always knew I was gifted, but at times, I thought I had wasted my gift. Shortly before that semester had started, my husband told me he wanted a divorce and I was terrified. I knew if we stayed together, we would destroy each other but I was worried if he left me, **I would get deported and I would be homeless, again.** I kept replaying the words my father in Germany had thrown at me when I told him, I wanted to move to the United States and get married, “in five years, you’re gonna stand in front of my door with two children and no education!” I did not have children but he was somewhat right: I had no education. The community college courses I had taken would mean nothing in Germany.

**Comment [P4]:** While you try to be the hero of your story, you can show vulnerability. The admissions officers would like to get to know YOU as a real person, not a glossy idealized poster of you.

I always knew I was gifted and **I finally came to appreciate it.** At the end of the semester, I was still in the same situation but I had come to view it differently. **No more did getting a divorce mean being homeless. Getting a divorce meant freedom. I could go wherever I wanted and I could take my life into my own hands without making compromises for anybody else.** I could go to an elite school if I wanted to and why would I not? Every Tuesday and Thursday I was reminded enthusiastically that I was BRILLIANT, POWERFUL, and LIMITLESS. Mrs. Lewis always emphasized that each and every single one of us had a gift, a gift that only we could give to the world.

**Comment [P5]:** catharsis

**Comment [P6]:** Admission’s officers at institutions that only accept a very low number of students (1-2% transfers at Ivy Leagues and Stanford) want to know that the student will take advantage of the opportunities she is given

I always knew I was gifted and I do not want to waste my gift. I realized that **somebody who has a gift has to give it.** I could graduate in a field that will promise me a career and a lot of money and I have thought about it. In the end, I would be disappointed in myself. I think people of exceptional intelligence have the responsibility to use their intellect to serve society. They can go into politics, become artists, authors, or pursue scientific inquiry. In my case, I would serve society as a psychological researcher. **I want to make discoveries about the human mind that will give others the opportunity to become more empowered.** At one of the top institutions in the country, I would not only receive a rigorous education, but I would also have the chance to be mentored by an already esteemed individual.

**Comment [P7]:** Returning back to the theme of using your education to further society

**Comment [P8]:** Answers question about “objectives you hope to achieve”

Words entered: 643

### Additional Information

Please provide an answer below if you wish to provide details of circumstances or qualifications not reflected in the application.

#### Graphite Somnia

Thirteen—intricate lines of ink, thinner than hair, flow and swerve alongside, intertwining into what we recognize as a person. A pretty girl with a bright smile on her face stands tall with her fist firmly pressed into her hip. Her attire tells of adventures. It entralls your imagination. I must have stared at this picture for hours. I wanted to draw. I, too, wanted to touch people with intricate lines of ink, thinner than hair, flowing and swerving alongside to intertwine into what they would recognize as beauty.

Fifteen—"YOU'RE CASTING PEARLS BEFORE SWINE! YOUR IQ IS SO HIGH, YOU COULD BE AN ACADEMIC AND HERE YOU ARE FAILING 9th GRADE!" I was silent. My face was petrified into a frown that sent a sharp sting right through that bit of flesh between my eyebrows. This insignificant number had set my father's expectations to a higher niveau. I often skipped school weeks at a time. I was terrified of recess; terrified of the teachers' voluntary blindness. Day after day, I crouched behind a wall, hearing footsteps, hoping they would not find me.

Sixteen—that summer I moved into a foster youth group and went to a new school. Somehow, my social awkwardness did not interfere with my sudden popularity and my friendly but cocky roommate boosted my confidence. When I moved into my own apartment at the age of seventeen, I had become a different person, someone I actually liked for the first time in my life.

Nineteen—eerie black smoke, rising into the red atmosphere of the night sky; firefighters hosing down seemingly impenetrable flames... Incredulous? We soon came to appreciate the reality of our situation after we were relocated into a tight office building where we continued to receive an exquisite education from teachers armed with chalk and dedication.

Twenty—I met a young American man over the internet. I fell in love with him.

Twenty-one—I traveled half-way around the world. I met the young man in person. I found out he was in love with me, too. After graduating, I decided to take a break from my education to be with him.

Twenty-two—I got married. I cut all ties to Germany. He had reservations and did not submit my green card application in time. I got denied. I had to go back.

Twenty-three—I was waiting in a room full of other destitutes to get a stamp that would designate me as homeless. I sat silently as I stared at a drunken man who had no future ahead of him lying on the floor. I thought to myself I had sunk to the lowest possible level. I was mad at my husband; mad at myself. I felt as though my life was over. The only thing that kept me sane was what had saved me my entire life—the secret escape route into my imagination.

**Comment [P9]:** This section can be used to let the admissions officers know about additional honors, activities, and awards that you did not have enough space for in the activities section or elaborate on an activity. I figured, however, that once you show that you have some honors and activities, they do not enhance your application anymore. I thought it would be more efficient to use this opportunity to present more of my personality to the admissions officers.

**Comment [P10]:** I spent a great amount of time researching and coming up with that title. It lays the groundwork for the rest of the essay

**Comment [P11]:** My age in each paragraph sets the structure of the essay

**Comment [P12]:** This is a good example of SHOWING rather than telling, I'm an artist. It does this in two ways: first of all, the content of this paragraph describes an artistic process, and secondly, the melody and structure of the language is artistic in and of itself

**Comment [P13]:** Don't be afraid to show you weren't always the perfect student

**Comment [P14]:** Use a lot of adjectives and descriptive verbs to paint a mental picture

**Comment [P15]:** The setting is vivid and the reader can imagine herself into my situation

**Comment [P16]:** I thought this paragraph was a little weak since it breaks with the flashback format. I had a flashback snippet for this age, too but it would not have fit into the 650 word limit. It was important to include it, though, because it mentions that I was in foster care → diversity

**Comment [P17]:** I kept the next three paragraphs short to signify that it is a fresh wound I am not ready to talk about

**Comment [P18]:** Admission's officers want diversity and if you had such an experience as being homeless or being in foster care, you should definitely mention that somewhere. Better yet, describe what it was like.

**Comment [P19]:** This shows how art has been an important part of my life even in adverse situations

Twenty-four—excitedly I showed my uncle-in-law, back at home in San Diego, the piece I had drawn for the gallery exhibition he had recommended me for. I was elated that one of my drawings would be featured in a gallery. Finally, I could call myself an artist. The curator loved my work and invited me to draw for other exhibitions. I drew one more piece, before San Diego Mesa College demanded my full attention.

**Comment [P20]:** This is kind of the happy ending. Furthermore, elite institutions want masters of one trade rather than jacks of all. Find something you're really good at and frame your application around it. This will give you compellingness.

Delicate brush strokes paint a red line through the fresco that is my life. It is art. It has always been art. It may be unorthodox, yet it was art that has led me to the major of psychology. It was my insatiable desire to comprehend my own characters that spawned a longing to understand the human mind. The psyche in all its elaborate complexity intrigues me as a beautiful work of art. I strive to grasp it more deeply, strive to conduct my own research. Alas, I appreciate I have exhausted Mesa College's opportunities and time is ripe to face greater challenges.  
Words entered: 650

**Comment [P21]:** This introductory sentence of the conclusion paragraph refers back to the artsy theme of the first paragraph.

**Comment [P22]:** Associate your specialty with your major to make sense of why you are studying this.

**Comment [P23]:** I purposely used the word appreciate rather than the more natural "regret," because you do not want to shed a negative light on your previous institution and appear ungrateful.

## Stanford Writing Supplement

Please briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences. (150 word limit)

**Comment [P24]:** This was another opportunity to showcase my artistic talent through artistic and vivid language.

A fine stroke of graphite tenderly breaks the purity of a snow white piece of paper. Soon enough, heavy grey contours will curl and dance around fragile lines and smooth gradients to form an image. I have shaped a magnificent universe inside my head in which I am creator, in which I am in full control and my pencil allows outsiders a glimpse into this extravaganza. Others do not understand that art is not merely a hobby to me. They do not understand that the illustrious world hidden beneath my skull drives any single important action in my life. Whenever I feel as if I am on the brink of breaking, I can call upon my ability to create. I can construct a sphere in which I am safe because I regulate it. I am the one who determines which things ought to happen and which things ought not happen.  
Words entered: 150

**Comment [P25]:** Since the main subject of this short essay answer is your specialty, I used it to show my artistic mind on steroids.

Please respond to the following seven inquiries so we can get to know you better. Do not feel compelled to use complete sentences.

Name your favorite books, authors, films, and/or musical artists. Literature: The Perfume, Patrick Süskind; A Midsummer Night's Dream, William Shakespeare; Faust I, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; Movies: Ghost in the Shell and Ghost in the Shell: Innocence, Director Mamoru Oshii; Jin-Roh, Director Mamoru Oshii; Terminator 2: Judgement Day, Director James Cameron; Singers: Aaliyah; Joy Denalane

**Comment [P26]:** To some of these it is difficult to come up with a creative answer and I did not answer all of the questions creatively, but try to surprise the admissions officers as much as you can to be memorable

What newspapers, magazines, and/or websites do you enjoy? GEO magazine, SPIEGEL magazine, National Geographic Magazine

**What is the most significant challenge that society faces today? (50 word limit)** Sexism and Racism—we have made significant progress in legislature; however, conditioning of traditional stereotypes through media and even our own selected environment is still pervasive.

**Comment [P27]:** I haven't mentioned this topic in the standard common app portion but it will later become important.

**How did you spend your last two summers? (50 word limit)** Studying Japanese, drawing, preparing for transfer

**What were your favorite events (e.g., performances, exhibits, sporting events, etc.) this past year? (50 word limit)** The Bus Experience: We sat, eyes closed, in a bus, stones thumping against the windows, people screaming—the experience of a black student when racial segregation ended. Hopping the border: crawling through dark tunnels, people screaming at us, threaten to rape our women. Behind the tunnels was an exhibit of photographs of lynchings.

**Comment [P28]:** This comes back to a previous answer and makes salient another specialty: social psychology

**What historical moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed? (50 word limit)** I would like to use a time machine to travel back about 2000 years. I would ask Jesus what he thinks about millions of people worshipping him as the son of God and what he thinks about religious dogmatism. Further, I want some of his insights on issues that conservatives and liberals clash on such as abortion and embryonic stem cell research.

**Comment [P29]:** This shows critical thinking skills

**What five words best describe you?** artist, inquisitor, philosopher, devil's advocate, helper

**Comment [P30]:** These are five words that are reflected in the rest of my application. Try to see your application holistically and make associations when you answer

**Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250 word limit)**

2002, Mainz, Germany: Excitedly, I grabbed the Amazon parcel and ripped the packaging into pieces. I eagerly stuck my new Ghost in the Shell video into the VCR. Little did I know, I was about to take in an experience that would change my life forever.

**Comment [P31]:** Initially, this essay was an important paragraph in my Graphite Somnia essay. Unfortunately, I had to cut it out because the essay was too long. So I decided to recycle the idea for this essay and the Yale supplement.

I gazed in fascination as a staccato of overwhelming impressions penetrated my immature mind. In a seemingly insignificant ramble, the puppet master laid out a brilliant philosophical insight. A self-aware computer program was shattering man's image as the pinnacle of creation.

Neurons fire in an all or nothing fashion similarly to the bits in a processor. A computer does not reach the sophistication of the brain. Yet, does a circuit board not resemble the brain in its most simple conception? It is possible that in a not-so-far future an elaborate computer may become a sentient entity. It is also possible that such processors will be used to enhance human brain capacity. In the latter case there is a potential to manipulate another person's perception and actions externally—a potential to hack someone's brain. How do I know this is not already the case? How do I know I am really sitting in front of this screen, typing an essay? I may very well just be a brain in a vat attached to a few electrodes.

**Comment [P32]:** This paragraph shows them my "intellectual vitality" in action, while introducing one of my other passions: philosophy

**Comment [P33]:** Reference to a known philosophical concept

There would still be several years ahead of me before I would learn these concepts in a classroom at the Gymnasium but that day, I discovered my passion for philosophy.

Words entered: 250

**Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate -- and us -- know you better. (250 word limit)**

I am an extroverted person and I enjoy being around other extroverts. I like being able to have an intellectual conversation every now and then, but I also think friends are there to have fun and be silly. Most people I surround myself with are either my age or younger. In a classroom setting, or in club activities, people usually see me as rather serious and organized, but, in my free time, I just want to act like a child because I think growing up is a trap!

When I was 16 years old, I lived in a foster youth group and it was the best time of my life. When I needed a friend, I could just open the door and go across the hall. I miss the times when we would all pile up in somebody's bed and tell each other scary stories and then freak out when the curtain moved. I have a couple of friends who live together and do those kinds of things. They always go out together and I envy them.

On an unrelated note, I love cats. A lot. Also, I am weird about music. I enjoy listening to Hip Hop, although I cannot stand rap in which women are being denounced. I like listening to R&B from the 50's until now. If you listen to Techno, Dubstep, or Country frequently, we should probably not share a room. P.S.: Please do not blast music while I study. That should be common courtesy.

Words entered: 249

**What matters to you, and why? (250 word limit)**

"Medicine, law, business, engineering—these are noble pursuits, and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love—these are what we stay alive for." I could not put it more bluntly than Robin Williams in his quote from Dead Poets Society. I am heading toward a career in psychological research and I hope to contribute information that will enhance the lives of many. However, what I work, eat, and sleep for is and will always be art.

When I look around the world, I see suffering large and small. People work themselves to death without ever having shed tears in appreciation for a beautiful work of art. The wider I open my eyes, the more injustice I see. We live in a day and age in which women have the legal standing of men, but the feminine role still requires dependence. We live in a day and age in which people of color have the legal standing of white people, but the role of a person of color still requires subservience. We live in a day and age in which homosexuals fight for the same legal standing as heterosexuals, but the homosexual role still requires remaining Other. Until we shed our limiting role schemata, we cannot fully enjoy the beauty that is all around us. It is the psychologist's responsibility to free our psyche from the fog that clouds our view of the spectacle before us.

Words entered: 235

**Comment [P34]:** This essay breaks the style of my previous essays because it is intended for a different audience. It is more simplistic and reminiscent of a dating profile description. However, keep in mind that the Admissions officers are still reading it.

**Comment [P35]:** Chance to remind them I was in foster care

**Comment [P36]:** Second mention of me being a feminist

**Comment [P37]:** Connect art with my major again

**Comment [P38]:** This implies to the reader that I am interested in social psychology, specifically, gender or racial psychology. This probably also why I was accepted. Stanford has a gender research institute and was therefore a perfect fit for me. Try to figure what your transfer institution affords you and then make it salient in your application, why you are a good fit for the school