

William J. Altman, Personal Essay

That summer was filled with fast car rides, the wind in my hair, and rock and roll in my ears. The excitement and adrenaline of the days were countered by cool, relaxing nights by a crackling campfire with friends. It was truly the best of times. Yet throughout that summer's three months of an easy ride, I felt a sense of longing that permeated every look in the mirror.

It is 10:30 in the morning on the first Monday back to school from summer vacation. Like clockwork the bell sounds and signals me to journey from my seat in AP Calculus, down the longest hallway in my school, to my International Relations class. However, today is no ordinary day for me. Today, I rock. With a bounce in my stride and a swagger in my glide, I make my way down the corridor and past countless students with a sense of pride. My confidence is not the result of the clothes I am wearing or of my social status. Nonetheless, my attitude is worn. It is worn with the emblem of a true renegade, a take-no-flak-from-anybody badge.

Today, I have facial hair.

Not peach fuzz or stubble, but a beard. A beard is something that signifies the step from a boy to a man. A beard is something I have waited for, ever since I received my first razor without the slightest bit of need for it. The summer was my transformation period—my beard, my pride.

As I continue my journey, I walk with my chin held high and my lips pushed together. My eyes are wide open, and I am smirking. Nobody can touch me. I am a senior on my way to bigger and better things with a way to show it. Nobody can touch me.

BEEEEEP!!! Wait, where did everybody go? That couldn't have been the bell. "Son, do you have a pass?" An administrator with a deep voice like James Earl Jones is towering over me. He has an exquisite beard. It hangs from his chin and begs for me to cling to it and ride around for the day. "Son, are you ok? I need a pass or you will have to go to the late room for this period." The hallway is idle with silence. I feel like I should keep my voice down.

"No sir, you see I don't have a pass, but I can explain . . ." Will he buy my story about today being a special day, a day for which I have waited months? I mean, honestly, as a fellow bearded you would think he could empathize.

"Son, go to the late room and don't be late again." I begin to panic. What will I miss in this period—critical notes, a pop-quiz? This is only the second time in my high school career that I have been late to class. My emblem of pride and months of waiting for the long walk have been sidelined and burned.

I reach the holding room and check in with the bald and seemingly hairless teacher at the desk. He makes a joke about a senior being late to class and says, "What happened? You get lost?" Funny. He lets me pick my seat and doesn't proceed to lay down any laws of the land. I appreciate his relaxed and understanding attitude. After sitting down and taking a deep breath, I make amends with my shattered ego and remember that the class I am missing is watching a movie. As I place my arms behind my head and lean back to stretch, I notice a poster of Che

Guevara on the wall. I sit and stare, taking in the vibrant orange and dull green contrast of the poster. He stares back. Someday, my friend. Someday.

That night I shaved my beard. For one, I learned that if shaved, the hair might grow back twice as thick, but more importantly I realized that my journey into manhood is just beginning. I realized that there is no one specific point in a person's life when he simply becomes a man. Growing up involves experience and disappointment. But as long as I put forth the patience and determination that have gone into my beard, I'll be ready for almost any hairy situation.

What Makes This a Good Essay?

- While this introduction seems generic and clichéd, it leads to a humorous—and unexpected—essay topic. William slowly reveals his subject, drawing his readers in with anticipation. Great introductions hook readers and entice them to read more.
- William doesn't really stray from the morning of the first day of senior year. A focused essay like this allows for more detail, which brings the story to life. Pick a specific moment and really explore it; make the reader feel like they are there.
- This is an original, memorable piece, which is perfect because admission staff read hundreds and sometimes thousands of essays. Pick a topic that makes your essay stand out!
- You can tell that William has a good sense of humor—his unique voice and personality are in every line. That is the ultimate goal of the application essay: convey your personality.
- This essay is about what growing up means to William, which he illustrates with a humorous anecdote. A memorable essay is more show than tell.
- Contrary to popular belief, it is possible to write a funny and effective application essay. If you're naturally funny, trust your instincts. But if you feel more comfortable writing a more serious essay, that's okay too. Bottom line? Be genuine.
- The final paragraphs succinctly and eloquently conclude William's essay, but it also ends on a funny note, which brings the piece full-circle.
- This essay is also good because of everything that's not there; it is free of misspellings, it is an appropriate length, and there are no run-on sentences or lengthy paragraphs