



With the top applicants from every high school applying to the best schools in the country, it's important to have an edge in your college application. Check out our updated list of 10 Harvard application essays below from students who made it in, and hear from expert college consultants about what made these work.

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## Successful Harvard Essay: Playing it Dangerous

In hazy stillness, a sudden flurry of colored skirts, whispers of “Merdel!” Sternly, my fingers smooth back my hair, although they know no loose strands will be found. My skin absorbs heat from stage lights above—if only that heat would seep into my brain, denature some proteins, and deactivate the neurons stressing me out. A warm hand, accompanied by an even warmer smile, interrupts my frenzied solitude. I glance up. My lovely teacher nods, coaxing my frozen lips into a thawed smile. A complex figure, filled in with doubt, yet finished with shades of confidence: My body takes its place and waits.

One, two, three, four; two, two, three, four. On stage, the lights and music wash over me. Never having had a true ballet solo before, my lungs are one breath away from hyperventilating. Trying to achieve a Zen-like state, I imagine a field of daisies, yet my palms continue sweating disobediently. It's not that I've never been on stage alone before; I've had plenty of piano recitals and competitions. Yet, while both performances consume my mind and soul, ballet demands complete commitment of my body.

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Gently slide into arabesque and lean downward; try not to fall flat on face—Mom's videotaping. In terms of mentality, I would hardly be described as an introvert; yet, a fear of failure has still kept me from taking risks. Maybe I was scared of leaping too high, falling too far, and hitting the hard floor. As I moved up in the cutthroat world of dance, this fear only increased; the pressure of greater expectations and the specter of greater embarrassment had held me contained. Now, every single eyeball is on me.

Lean extra in this pirouette; it's more aesthetic. But is it always better to be safe than sorry? Glancing toward the wings, I see my teacher's wild gesticulations: Stretch your arms out, she seems to mime, More! A genuine smile replaces one of forced enthusiasm; alone on the stage, this is my chance to shine. I breathe in the movements, forget each individual step. More than just imagining, but finally experiencing the jubilation of the music, I allow my splits to stretch across the stage and my steps to extend longer and

longer, until I'm no longer safe and my heart is racing. Exhilarated and scared in the best way, I throw myself into my jumps. I no longer need to imagine scenes to get in the mood; the emotions are twirling and leaping within me.

Reaching, stretching, grabbing, flinging ... My fear no longer shields me. I find my old passion for ballet, and remember the grace and poise that can nevertheless convey every color of emotion. Playing it safe will leave me part of the backdrop; only by taking risks can I step into the limelight. Maybe I'll fall, but the rush is worth it. I'll captain an all-male science bowl team, run a marathon, audition for a musical, and embrace the physical and intellectual elation of taking risks.

## Professional Review by MR. MBA®, Val Misra

Lisa creates a winning essay by successfully invoking real emotions in the reader through her creative, descriptive prose that conveys vivid imagery, heartfelt feelings, and wholesome introspection. I instantly likened Lisa's allegory to a bird trapped in a closed cage; the cage serves as a metaphor for what we all face in our lives, our fears. Lisa's first ballet solo is brilliantly illustrated as her 'Aha! moment' where she sheds her fears (opens her cage) and, with careful self-reflection, chooses to embrace future risks (flies only forward).

In paragraphs 1-3, Lisa captivates us instantly through her beautiful, rich language and imagery, as she portrays herself immobilized by stress and a fear of failure and family/public opinion. I empathize and want to learn more! Her warm humor shines perfectly: wanting to deactivate her brain neurons and reminding herself not to fall face-first lest she gets scolded by her mother/family - wonderfully done! Lisa uses her “lovely teacher” as her grounding, comfort zone and supporter, a theme many can share. Her anxiety is relatable, and she uses this to explicate her general risk averse nature.

In paragraphs 4-5, Lisa's solo is radiantly depicted as her defining moment where she dances and realizes her transformation- fears turn to passion and excitement. She is poetry in motion in the moment, smiling, shedding her fears, and embracing risk like a warm glass of milk. A poignant question is posed, "But it is always better to be safe than sorry?" Through introspection, Lisa expresses her desire to pursue risks that will advance her personally. Acknowledging she may not always succeed, "the rush is worth it". Lisa ends with concrete examples of leadership roles and activities that she will pursue at college- admissions officers favorably view students eager to step outside their comfort zones and embark on new adventures/challenges at college. To make this essay stronger, Lisa could have highlighted precisely how she will tackle any fears that may crop up during new obstacles at college, tying to lessons learned through her ballet.

Superbly written in a distinct narrative form, this essay crafts an experience that is vibrant, funny, deep, and relatable. Lisa's brand values seamlessly flow throughout the essay: creativity, determination, overcoming obstacles, self-reflection, growth through risk and, of course, passion! We are left with a glowing lesson in motivation in the hope of ridding oneself of such negative feelings to go on and achieve greater things - 'playing it dangerous'.

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