



10 Successful Harvard Application Essays | 2023

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 list of 10 new Harvard application essays from students who made it in, and hear from expert college consultants about what made these work.

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Amy's Essay

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Successful Harvard Essay: 'The Color of Everything'

There's a theory that even though each color has a specific wavelength that never changes, how people perceive a specific color may have subtle differences based on small differences in photoreceptors, and the color that one person might consider red might still be red in another's mind but could look different—a little duller, softer, cooler. Furthermore, how a person's brain processes the color may also be linked to that person's environment. Some studies have suggested that color sensitivity could be linked to one's native languages; for example, people who speak languages that have specific names for eleven colors are able to easily distinguish those eleven colors, but people who speak languages with fewer color specific words may have a harder time distinguishing them.

So it appears that even at the most elementary level of sight, the world is not an objective thing. Instead, what we know and what we remember can influence what and how we see. The color blue may just be the color blue to a three year old, perhaps her favorite color even, but an adult might connect it to so much more—the lake by his childhood home or the eye color of a loved one.

Knowledge is color; it is depth, and it is seeing a whole new world without having to move an inch.

I first consciously became aware of the power that our experiences have to change perception when I went to turn on a light in my house after learning about photons in class. What had previously been a mundane light suddenly became a fascinating application of atomic structure, and I thought that I could almost perceive the electrons jumping up and down from energy level to energy level to produce the photons that I saw. I then realized that my world had steadily been changing throughout my years in school as I learned more and more. I now see oligopolies in the soda aisles of the supermarkets. I see the charges warring with each other in every strike of lightning, and the patterns of old American politics still swaying things today. Knowledge and making connections with that knowledge is the difference between seeing the seven oceans glittering in the sun and merely seeing the color blue. It's the difference between just seeing red and seeing the scarlet of roses blooming, the burgundy of blood pumping through veins, and crimson of anger so fierce that you could burst.

Knowledge is color; it is depth, and it is seeing a whole new world without having to move an inch.

It is knowledge, too, that can bring people together. I love listening to people's stories and hearing about what they know and love, because if I learn about what they know, I can learn how they see the world; consequently, since behavior is often based upon perception, I can understand why a person behaves the way they do. On a road trip during the summer, my mom kept looking up at the streetlights lining the highways. When I asked why, she told me that whenever she saw lights by a highway she would wonder if her company had made them. She would guess how tall they were, how wide, and what style they were. She told me that ever since she started working for her company, lights no longer were just lights to her. They were a story of people who first had to measure the wind speed to figure out what dimension the lights had to be, and then of engineers, of money passing hands—possibly even under her own supervision as an accountant—and then of transportation, and of the people who had to install them. I might never perceive lights the exact way my mother does or see her "red" but by hearing her describe what she knows, I can understand her world and realize her role in ours.

Beauty and color are in the world, but it is seeking the unknown and making new connections that unlocks them from their greyscale cage.

Professional Review by MR. MBA®, Val Misra

Amy crafts a standout, thought-provoking essay centered on 'intellectual curiosity' using vivid, descriptive language to connect intriguing scientific theories, studies on colors and sight to showcase how our limited or expansive knowledge can shape our reality and experiences. Evident throughout the essay is Amy's continuing passion and growth to learn and connect her knowledge to her surroundings to find hidden truths. That one can seek to understand another's behavior or perception by learning their knowledge or story is a simple yet deeply profound, macro theme- the curiosity for knowledge, truth, sharing ideas and experiences can undeniably bring many people together. I am reminded of the discoverer of special and general relativity Albert Einstein's famous self-quote: "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."

The essay is very well-structured; each paragraph further illuminates Amy's thirst for new information and connection. In paragraphs 1-2, she begins with a fascinating scientific backdrop of how colors, despite having a particular wavelength, can be visually different to two people based on the number of languages they know. This is captivating; I want to read more! She seamlessly ties theories and studies on colors to deduce that our world is not a one-size-fits-all journey and our individual education, experiences can change what we see and how.

In paragraph 3, Amy exemplifies her first 'A-ha' moment, realizing and visualizing her classroom learning of the true scientific process of photon particles emanating from her "mundane light"! Her sponge-like mind, soaking in new streams of data within her growing world, begins connecting everyday activities to big-picture ideas- economics, natural phenomenon, and politics. This is very well explained!

Paragraph 4 is a gamechanger. Her education-to-social-understanding mantra further enlightens us: education, open-mindedness and learning about others' stories, experiences can indeed create bridges between seemingly different worlds. Amy provides a final example using her own mother's awareness of highway streetlights to show that anyone can connect their knowledge, experiences with their environment. Amy closes superbly imparting wisdom from her own life and clear introspection for "seeking the unknown and making connections."

Overall, Amy builds to a potent conclusion: Education, empathy, listening, understanding, and connecting, all drive her intellectual passion for life. Citing her desire to understand all things, especially people, Amy portrays herself as a passionately curious and likable student- an ideal addition to a vibrant academic community.

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