

Princeton University college application supplemental essays
by [Brian Tomasik](#), fall 2004

Essay 1

Tell us about a person who has affected your life in a significant way.

On a chilly evening in November, I walked with my mother and sister over the damp lawns of a local college on the way to the auditorium, in which Ralph Nader was to give a speech. I, having never heard Nader before, was uncertain what to expect, but once Nader stepped out onto the stage and began to speak about growing problems and injustices, I found myself being moved—not to anger or hopelessness, but to motivation. Particularly inspiring was the idea that Americans, more than anyone else, have the education, opportunity, and influence to significantly change the world; to ignore our civic obligations, therefore, is to throw away an extraordinary chance to improve the lives of people all over the globe.

To this day, I am still inspired by the address that Nader gave more than four years ago and by the work that he and others continue to do. Nader's influence has made me more interested in politics, history, and learning in general; I have become a better student because I have seen that knowledge has real meaning, and that a detailed understanding of the world's problems is essential for success in efforts to address them. I have also found reason to participate in extracurricular clubs, and I have gained the courage to engage in discussions about these important topics. And I have in general become more joyful, optimistic, and fulfilled, because there is nothing more rewarding than striving, in whatever way, to make the world a better place.

Essay 2

Write on any other topic of your choice or design.

All educators teach students information. But only a few actually teach students how to think.

For me, one of those few was Richard Lasselle, my eighth-grade earth-science teacher. Recognizing that students too often view education merely as an accumulation of facts, Mr. Lasselle challenged my class with questions that required not just knowledge but the ability to combine that knowledge with common sense to solve problems that we had never before encountered. At the same time, Mr. Lasselle's policies—such as setting no deadlines for labs and allowing students to resubmit assignments as many times as they wished—reflected his belief in doing whatever would best allow students to learn, even if it was untraditional. Mr. Lasselle was similarly not afraid to stray from the state curriculum to try unique assignments, such as designing a wind-propelled vehicle or calculating the exact time of sunrise on any day of the year.

In these two areas, and in others, Mr. Lasselle transformed my approach to learning. I now memorize only what I have to, and I conceptualize everything else. I try to do whatever is most effective for understanding, not necessarily for earning the highest grades. Mr. Lasselle's class powerfully demonstrated to me that the actual material learned in school is ancillary, and that the paramount value of education lies in showing students how to think, how to learn, and how to teach themselves.

CASDA Description of Mr. Lasselle

Select a teacher who has had a significant and beneficial influence on you and explain in 25 words or fewer how that teacher has made a major difference in your education.

Richard Lasselle's Earth-Science class showed me the value of understanding instead of memorizing, of thinking critically instead of passively, of asking "why" instead of "what."

Summers

Please tell us how you have spent the last two summers (or vacations between school years), including any jobs you have held.

Summer 2003

- Collected water samples from the local reservoir and measured their levels of phosphorus, an indicator of water quality.
- Volunteered at the Guilderland Public Library two or three times a week.
- One-week "learn to play tennis" program at Guilderland Central High School.
- Independently wrote a report and letter to the Guilderland Board of Education about the environmental benefits of recycled paper.
- Attended a three-day Northeast Organic Farmers' Association (NOFA) Summer Conference in Amherst.

Summer 2004

- Continued my water-quality research on the reservoir, this time measuring temperature and dissolved oxygen as well as phosphorus, and submitting my findings to the Intel Science Talent Search.
- One-week "environmental field studies" program at Southampton College.
- Volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and the Albany Pine Bush.
- Attended NOFA Summer Conference.