

Personal Statement Example

Example 1

The twisting roads, ornate mosaics, and fragrant scent of freshly ground spices had been so foreign at first. Now in my fifth week of the SNYI-L summer exchange program in Morocco, I felt more comfortable in the city. With a bag full of pastries from the market, I navigated to a bus stop, paid the fare, and began the trip back to my host family's house. It was hard to believe that only a few years earlier my mom was worried about letting me travel around my home city on my own, let alone a place that I had only lived in for a few weeks. While I had been on a journey towards self-sufficiency and independence for a few years now, it was Morocco that pushed me to become the confident, self-reflective person that I am today.

As a child, my parents pressured me to achieve perfect grades, master my swim strokes, and discover interesting hobbies like playing the oboe and learning to pick locks. I felt compelled to live my life according to their wishes. Of course, this pressure was not a wholly negative factor in my life — you might even call it support. However, the constant presence of my parents' hopes for me overcame my own sense of desire and led me to become quite dependent on them. I pushed myself to get straight A's, complied with years of oboe lessons, and dutifully attended hours of swim practice after school. Despite all these achievements, I felt like I had no sense of self beyond my drive for success. I had always been expected to succeed on the path they had defined. However, this path was interrupted seven years after my parents' divorce when my dad moved across the country to Oregon.

I missed my dad's close presence, but I loved my new sense of freedom. My parents' separation allowed me the space to explore my own strengths and interests as each of them became individually busier. As early as middle school, I was riding the light rail train by myself, reading maps to get myself home, and applying to special academic programs without urging from my parents. Even as I took more initiatives on my own, my parents both continued to see me as somewhat immature. All of that changed three years ago, when I applied and was accepted to the SNYI-L summer exchange program in Morocco. I would be studying Arabic and learning my way around the city of Marrakesh. Although I think my parents were a little surprised when I told them my news, the addition of a fully-funded scholarship convinced them to let me go.

I lived with a host family in Marrakesh and learned that they, too, had high expectations for me. I didn't know a word of Arabic, and although my host parents and one brother spoke good English, they knew I was there to learn. If I messed up, they patiently corrected me but refused to let me fall into the easy pattern of speaking English just as I did at home. Just as I had when I was younger, I felt pressured and stressed about meeting their expectations. However, one day, as I strolled through the bustling market square after successfully bargaining with one of the street vendors, I realized my mistake. My host family wasn't being unfair by making me fumble through Arabic. I had applied for this trip, and I had committed to the intensive language study. My host family's rules about speaking Arabic at home had not been to fulfill their expectations for me, but to help me fulfill my expectations for myself. Similarly, the pressure my parents had put on me as a child had come out of love and their hopes for me, not out of a desire to crush my individuality.

As my bus drove through the still-bustling market square and past the medieval Ben-Youssef madrasa, I realized that becoming independent was a process, not an event. I thought that my parents' separation when I was ten had been the one experience that would transform me into a self-motivated and autonomous person. It did, but that didn't mean that I didn't still have room to grow. Now, although I am even more self-sufficient than I was three years ago, I try to approach every experience with the expectation that it will change me. It's still difficult, but I understand that just because growth can be uncomfortable doesn't mean it's not important