

College Admissions Essay Revision

The Prompt

Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

The Revised College Essay

Deer flies buzzed my head and sweat poured down my back. My backpack dug into my sides, and I was sure I had just heard rustlings that could only bode a visit from a ferocious bear. My dad and I were headed into the back regions of swamps and raspberry bushes, at least a thousand miles from home and regular communication. Mud pulled at my sneakers, brambles cut my legs, and tree branches swatted my face. We had packed early in the morning for my first camping trip, my dad's attempt to bond before I started my senior year. We weren't bound for coastal shores, sculpted campsites, or shower rooms with warm water, we were going deep into wilderness...for two whole weeks.

When we reached the pond where we would set up our home-away-from-home, I was already set to leave. But, no! Dad set about unpacking our gear, preparing the ground, and putting up the tent, while I contemplated food. I suspected there wasn't going to be a quick trip to the fridge for ice cream and soda out here. I learned quickly in order to eat we needed a camp fire, a place to put our staples so animals wouldn't get into them, and the meal itself. It was a good 45 minutes later, while the sun set and the flies bit, that we got our first trout.

Those two weeks were difficult. My dad and I did everything from scratch; I even built my own outhouse. I had to carry water, find berries, get wood for the fire, dry out wet clothes from a night of rain, and even mend things that broke, like my fishing pole. I grew stronger, and that strength was something that came not only from knowing how to cook my own food, lug armfuls of wood three or four times a day, and make my own safe and cozy place in the world, no matter where. I learned something about myself. I could survive. I didn't need my cell phone or my TV or my CDs, even my friends and my car to get along. I could do pretty well with a full stomach, good sleep, hard exercise, and, yep, a book, which dad had insisted I bring along.

I also had dad. He and I had never really talked like we did over those two weeks. It's amazing how many things had been left unsaid over the years after he divorced my mom. He told me about how much the divorce hurt, how he and mom had met and fell in love, how much he loved me. I got to ask him what caused the divorce and how he felt about mom and his new wife. He explained it all and it made some sense. The divorce didn't happen out of nowhere. There had been problems even before I was born. And, they didn't hate me or each other. They had good and bad feelings and memories, just like I did. That was a revelation, an adult one. Things are not always perfect, but that doesn't mean they're all bad either.

The Friday dad and I left the woods, we were still sweating and the deer flies were still biting, but I felt different. I grew up on that camping trip. I gained an inner sense of confidence and independence and I learned life is never the picture-perfect image you create in your head. There are wet sleeping bags, meals that have to be made, and relationships that don't always work. But, that's okay; I'll cope. (595 words)

Comments on the Revision

The revision now brings the reader into the story without using words from the prompt or giving too much background. A good story lets in the background as it goes along and doesn't tell everything. Details abound all the way through. Now we don't just read it's a long trek into the pond where they camp; but we see, hear, and feel what that walk in was like. We know what he did for two weeks without a blow-by-low, day-by-day description. We know what his conversations with his dad were like.

The conclusion explains why this was a significant experience without ever using the words, and at the same time rounds off the story with a familiar reference to the beginning. The humor and the sense of this writer as a real person are still strong. The ideas of how he became stronger and how he began to accept the imperfections of his parents' and his lives are better tied to the description. Now we can see why the recount of his conversations with his father and the hard work at the campsite affected him.

The text is also tighter, down from 700 words to 600, still a bit long—550 would be better—but, the ease and flow of the text keeps it readable, even if long. The suggestion for the revision to marry the second and third paragraphs could still be done. Could you do it?

Note: If you submit an essay over 500 words on-line, the extra words will be truncated (cut off), so an application with a longer essay needs to be sent in by mail!

Don't Forget to Polish

Revision is all about content. But, even after a revision is done, you still need to proofread or do the **polish**. This is when you double and triple check to make sure all the grammar, mechanics, spellings, etc. are perfect. Some people can proofread their own work, but most cannot. You need help from someone with a trained eye, not just a friend for this step. You should also read it ALOUD to make sure words are not missing and it reads the way you want it to sound. This **polish** is the final and very necessary step.

Look above. There are still mistakes: a verb tense problem, at least three compound sentence punctuation errors, and a run on sentence. Can you find them?