

## **Using the Pony Club Experience to Enhance Your College Essay**

Beyond submitting your grades, test scores, awards, extra-curricular activities, and letters of recommendation, most colleges also require a personal statement. This short essay is meant to reflect your personality and give you an opportunity to distinguish yourself amongst the vast sea of applicants.

Unless you are applying to an equine studies college, admissions officers will receive hundreds to thousands of essays on people's travels, mothers, and church organizations but surely, very few about horses and even fewer about being involved in an international equestrian organization. Writing about your experiences in Pony Club can be a perfect avenue for making a strong impression with the school of your dreams.

Before you begin drafting your essay, brainstorm. Write down as many different experiences you have had in Pony Club that have left a strong impression on you. Is there a specific rally that sticks out in your mind? Or a specific horse? What about a specific ride or lesson? Have you have had the opportunity to compete in championships or festival? Visiting instructor program? Working student position? Remember that what is most important about the experience you chose to write about is not whether or not you succeeded, but what you learned from the experience.

Once you have a list of possible experiences for your essay, write down specific qualities you feel you have gained from being in Pony Club. These could include: teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, compassion, planning, perseverance, patience, time-management, goal setting, self-discipline, attention to detail, money management, crisis management.

For example, in her 2007 essay to UC Davis, National Youth Board Member Hannah Jarvis wrote about her experience having to evacuate her family and horses in the middle of the night due to the Cedar Fires in Southern California. She focused on describing how her experiences in Pony Club led her to be prepared and calm, despite the dangerous and high stress environment.

Rallies and certification testings provide the perfect opportunity to talk about your ability to independently plan and prepare and working with and as a team. Try to choose something that shows how something prepared you to be a great student in the area of your chosen major or area of study. Remember to be specific. Rather than writing about "How my horse changed my life" you should focus on a specific event or quality.

If you aren't applying to an Equine Studies College, most universities and colleges admissions officers will be unfamiliar with the USPC so defining USPC and including the mission statement may be helpful.

Below are some examples of essays NYB members have written for college scholarships and entrances. Please use them as examples only and **DO NOT PLAGERIZE!**

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*Prompt: Describe an event in your life, a person, a book, an experience (choose one) that has had a profound effect on you and influenced change in you, your attitudes, or your goals.*

### Own It

As I ride straight, deep into the corner, I slowly slide my outside leg back and press gently with my inside leg, keeping my upper body still. The canter comes effortlessly, without haste, without burden.

"Cool!" Jill yells from the other side of the arena. "How did that feel?"

"Amazing!" I replied, smiling.

This was Jill. Jill Hassler was one of the most influential riding instructors and most influential people I've ever known. More than anyone else, she taught me about my horse, life, and myself. Although she has now passed on, her teachings and messages are with me every day.

The very first day I met Jill, I was scared to death. Jill had an overwhelming presence. She stood about 5' 8" with a fairly robust frame. However, she walked as if she were royalty. Her shoulders were always even and tall; she walked, sat, and talked with perfect posture. She rarely looked down as she taught and took even, rhythmical steps. Her voice was most often calm, but on certain occasions, when trying to prove a point, the tone of her voice would not change but would merely become louder and louder as she asked for more and more. She shouted with a voice that seemed to be a cross of the Marine Corp "Ooh Rah," the German guttural stop (which she inevitably gained from training horses in Germany for many years), and an almost feminine tone that was purely Jill. Although she was daunting, she was one of the most humble people I have ever met. Jill was widely accomplished having written five books, owning several equestrian training barns in her lifetime, and raising four children. Still, she made every lesson seem deeply personal; she cared about every aspect of her students' lives, a quality that made her lessons and camps that much more meaningful.

Jill had a way of really looking into my soul. I could walk into the arena, not saying a word, and Jill would ask, "What's wrong?" Jill knew me. After the very first time she met me, Jill knew *who* I was. She was the first person to really help reveal what kind of person I am. Until I met Jill, I really had no idea that I was so negative: I didn't know that I internalized every single mistake I made when riding and yelled at myself subconsciously. I didn't know that I was such a perfectionist. After awhile, I realized that I hated it when I didn't do an exercise right the very first time, and that I needed to learn to let that frustration go. She let me know that I probably had the worst patience known to mankind. Paired with my negative and perfectionist mind, these three attributes did *not* make for very uncomplicated lessons. Jill knew her lessons weren't easy for me because she had learned the very same life-lessons the hard way as I was now doing, and instead of selfishly letting me flounder in my own flaws, she gently pushed me along, using her witty comments and seemingly endless wisdom to help me through even the darkest moments of my early teen years. She asked the hard questions. She demanded that I defend my position on almost any issue and that I answer honestly when my horse, Pete, who was supposed to be staying straight, had suddenly, mysteriously, become crooked to the left. Not a lesson went by that I didn't wince in fear when her voice began to rise, and I knew I hadn't fixed something that I was supposed to. As a student of Jill's, I learned to recognize the signs of when Jill was pleased and when she was not. I would begin to smile when I heard her chuckle at my delight, and to sit up straight and look where I was going when I heard her voice begin to

stiffen and rise.

Even through all these tough life lessons and sometimes long, angry sessions, Jill never let me leave without telling her, or her telling me, something positive about my ride. From this positive reinforcement, I gained the utmost confidence. I began to grow as a person and a rider as our years together grew longer. I began to learn her small quirks, even her favorite word, “Cool,” and her favorite phrase, “Own it.”

That’s what I remember about Jill the most, that favorite phrase of hers. If my horse did something well, she would first ask "Did you feel it?" and if I nodded yes, then she would simply say "Own it." After awhile, I learned to own it all. My canter transition my sitting trot, and very recently, my life. Jill gave me the confidence, the courage, and the tools to take my life into my hands and learn to own it. Own it, own it, and own it. The words run through my head every day. Make it yours, live it, breathe it, think it... own it.

I didn't realize until after her death how much Jill had taught me. Her wisdom, wit, and even just her presence made me who I am today. Quite often, when having trouble with my new young horse, Forbes, I try to think of what Jill would say, what Jill would do, what Jill would tell me. Most often, the wisdom that I call back works; and in the very remote corners of my mind, a small voice echoes, "Own it."

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*Prompt: Everyone belongs to many different communities and/or groups defined by (among other things) shared geography, religion, ethnicity, income, cuisine, interest, race, ideology, or intellectual heritage. Choose one of the communities to which you belong, and describe that community and your place within it. (approx 250 words)*

“Pony Club” – it sounds harmless, even sweet, and when I mention the name of the organization to friends, they picture little girls going through their horse phase, soon to be replaced by facebook, and boy trouble. But it is so much more than that. According to its website, the mission of the United States Pony Club (USPC) is "to provide a program for youth that teaches riding, mounted sports, and the care of horses and ponies, thereby developing responsibility, moral judgment, leadership and self-confidence." For me, it has done all that, and also provided me with a community of like-minded horse lovers young and old who have taught me much of what I know about living life to the fullest – how to merge passion with knowledge, hard work with fun, how to balance risk and responsibility, how to succeed and fail with grace.

I became a member when I was ten, and since then my life has changed. I can no longer count the friends I’ve made in USPC on my fingers and toes. I’ve traveled to Kentucky, Maryland, Illinois, Indiana, Virginia and Tennessee for various competitions, and in 2009, I led my regional team to a national championship. I’ve studied until I could recognize fifty different plants that are poisonous to horses and name all the bones in horse’s leg.

My place in USPC cannot be defined by one word as I am taught, teach, give back and receive from this miraculous organization. I am a friend, volunteer, teacher, student, and leader. I give back daily, by teaching younger clubbers and helping to run our regions junior board. However much I do, though, I feel that USPC always gives me more. The truth is, Pony Club is my extended family. The people I have met will be nestled in my heart forever and I am proud that I have earned my place among them. I love the roles I play because they allow me to be part of a community that enriches not only my riding, but my character as well.

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## Study of a Horse

Many people can relate to a piece of art at some level. For me, Leonardo Da Vinci's "Study of a Horse" isn't just an incredible sketchbook drawing, but something that can tell the story of a major part of my life. I have been riding for thirteen years and through the United States Pony Club, I have made it my goal to learn as much as I can, much like Da Vinci did in his study. I have realized that something that was once a hobby and "just for fun," has become a potential career and success in the industry is a major life goal. More importantly, it has taught me countless life lessons at a young age and made me realize who I am as a person.

"Study of a Horse" focuses on the anatomical correctness and motion of a heavy workhorse and you can see in the study that Da Vinci was learning as he went along. You can see the angle of the hoof change as he goes, the degree of rotation of the cannon bone decrease, the length of the pastern increase and everything fall into place. This is much like watching myself develop as a rider and young horsewoman. From watching my body angles close over fences to my back straightening to developing a deeper understanding and feel for what is going on with the beast underneath me. Not only has riding in United States Pony Clubs helped me develop as a horsewoman, but also as a person.

Drawing teaches discipline, like how to work in an organized and timely fashion and to be prepared. Being a member of Pony Club has taught me the same things. In the "horse world" everything is on a schedule, and with the way the Pony Club competitions (know as rallies) are set up, always on a strict schedule and with points on the line for tardiness, I have learned to work on a time frame, make deadlines, to be punctual and to stay on my toes. Pony Club has also taught me to be organized, particularly when on the road or in competition. If asked where something is in my trunk, I can give a definite answer quickly and precisely. This is helpful when it comes to being prepared. Da Vinci's quick study on a horse might have been in preparation for a larger work, this piece might have just been a "test run" before the final, finished product. When it comes to riding competitively, showing and going for upper level tests, preparedness is the key to success. A rider doesn't go to a show and expect to compete in something they have never done before, they practice at home before with their trainer and horse. When they arrive at the show grounds, everything is in competition order, show clothes are clean and wrinkle free, their is horse bathed and shiny, and equipment is clean and spotless. Being prepared, timely and organized are keys to success in the equestrian world.

Not only have I learned to work on a schedule, to be organized and prepared, but I have learned to take criticism and self-humiliation in stride. Having been given the opportunity to ride under Olympians, world-renowned trainers and Pony Club's terrifying and intimidating National Examiners (they do all the national level testings and strike fear into the hearts of many), I have learned to take criticism in a positive fashion and to use it to change for the better. I've learned to not get cocky and overly self-confident. Horses are living creatures and, just like humans, they just "have those days" and don't always feel like putting on their game face. Learning to be happy with what I have and to just laugh it off are possibly the most important things I have ever learned from a horse.

These changes and developments have all been leading up to one thing – achieving the elusive national specialty certifications. Years of preparation, practice and studying have been leading up to these tests, much like Da Vinci's practice and studies leading to his understanding of a horse. With these upper level goals in mind, I have become someone that is always on the look out for the right horse, the perfect horse and upper level partner. Something with spirit,

character, drive, mind, athleticism and build. I look at every animal, sculpture, picture and drawing and think “Would I buy that horse?” Through horses, and my never ending search for the right one, I have developed an eye for small details. At first glance, I thought the horse in Da Vinci’s study was odd, pretty, but odd. After having studied this drawing closely for so long, as if it were a sales prospect, I realized that Da Vinci in fact did draw this horse with rather good conformation. It may not seem like much, but a few years ago I would have looked at his study and thought “What a cool horse” and left it at that.

Da Vinci’s drawings started out as just a spark of interest and by him being put in an arts school at a young age. That spark developed into a fire and a passion, similar to how riding did for me. He had a desire to learn, and one can see it when they look at his Study of a Horse. His small study is like a semi crash course in what I’ve been studying for the last thirteen years and will continue to study for the rest of my life. Much like how drawing was one of Da Vinci’s passions, horses are my passion and what I plan to make a career of.

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### Raw intelligence is not the only indicator of a successful person.

As far back as I can remember, I have always loved horses. Now, I know that I want to do something significant with the knowledge I have learned from my horse experiences. To make an impact on the world you don’t have to be the smartest, or the best test taker, but you do have to have the heart to want to genuinely help others.

Living on a farm my whole life, I have had the responsibility of taking care of the horses and other animals on the property. With the experience of taking care of the competition horses came basic knowledge of nutrition and anatomy. I had to balance rations, plan strict exercise regimens, and manage veterinarian problems that would arise, such as assessing injuries, giving shots, drawing blood, and bandaging wounds. Volunteering at a large equine emergency vet clinic also helped me to hone the skills I have been practicing my entire life.

I have actively participated in an international equine organization, USPC, since I was six years old. I have attended monthly educational meetings since then and have prepared and taught the meetings for the last five years. USPC has a national rating system that tests equine knowledge. I achieved the “HA” rating at 16, the youngest possible age, where the national pass rate is less than 30% for members aged 16-25. The knowledge for the “HA” is equivalent to a first year equine veterinarian. I have also held the leadership positions of Regional Junior Board President and National Youth Board candidate for USPC.

Working with horses also involves constant interaction with people. I have taught riding lessons to children, trained horses for adults, presented before international judges, and have been a part of and Captain of many teams. Through these experiences I know that I want a career that incorporates human interaction with my technical skills. I am often complimented on my ability to mentor others and recently won a USPC award for character and leadership. In the past I have also been presented the Glynis Roth Award for sportsmanship and enthusiasm.

My passion for working with people and making a difference encouraged me to be involved with several different community service based organizations including the Rotary Interact Club and the National Honor Society where I currently hold office positions as the head of Public Relations for Rotary and President of NHS. My eyes were opened to my love for helping those in need, when the Rotary Club cooked lunch for chronically ill children and their

families. We also handed out school supplies in a poverty stricken neighborhood. I was asked to help direct Spanish speaking families through the supply line, talking to them about the process and helping them as they gathered the necessities that their children would need for their school year. I was inspired by the experience, being told by a father how much our help meant to his family, as school supplies were not going to fit in their budget.

My compassion and empathy for children and teenagers inspired me to start an after school mentoring program for middle school girls called L.E.G.I.T. where they can get together to support each other and be mentored by inspiring high school girls. I am realizing how my years of involvement with youth in the equine area has encouraged and empowered me to expand beyond and into my community.

Another way my love and active participation in horses has shaped my intellectual interests is my passion to pursue Spanish as a second language.

Having lived in many states within the southwest, I am surrounded by the Spanish language and Hispanic culture. Working in the horse industry, I have to interact with many fluent Spanish speakers. I have several friends that have moved to the United States from Spanish speaking countries and I truly enjoy embracing their cultures. My parents love to remind me that “agua” was the first word that I spoke when I was a baby. Now that I am into my fourth year of Spanish, I am realizing that I would love to continue learning Spanish, so that I can carry it on to the professional world, hopefully using it with a medical or nursing degree.

I am very excited about the opportunity to combine all that I have learned from my background with horses and teaching younger children, and using it to pursue my dream to work with Spanish speaking children in the medical field.