



Proficient | Exemplar Essay

Mistakes Were Made

Learn From Your Mistakes



Plot and Ideas

The storyline effectively establishes an engaging, plausible context (My dad got a new job and so we had to move and, of course, change schools midyear"). The exposition supports the establishment of the plot ("But in my new school, I could be anybody"). Description effectively builds toward a climax and effective resolution ("Thanks to Mr. B., I found a new group of friends who encouraged me").



Development and Elaboration

The narrative establishes and maintains a clear setting (the new school). The introduction of and dialogue with Mr. B advances the story and reveals the central idea through meaningful description ("He helped me to see that each and every time I was faced with a choice to meet my responsibilities or not, I was the one making the choice, not everyone else").



Organization and Sequencing

The narrative utilizes a clear sequence of events to establish a beginning ("My sophomore year was the worst of my life"), middle, and end. Pacing supports the story's development and transitions signal shifts in time. The resolution offers closure to and reflects on the course of events ("If you want your life to go in the right direction, then you need to accept responsibility for your actions").



Language and Style

The narrative uses description to show, not tell, how the character fails to live up to expectations set by himself ("I started hanging out in the hallways with my new friends, trying to clown around and get their attention"). Writing is interesting, varied, and builds the narrator's voice. The narrative employs language throughout in order to convey a matter-of-fact tone.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait 'looks like' in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see "25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays" by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

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Notes

Learn From Your Mistakes

Everybody makes mistakes, but you have to choose whether to learn from them and accept it or you can dodge it. It all depends on the kind of person you are. Accepting the responsibility coming from that mistake can lighten the burden everyone carries around.

My sophomore year was the worst of my life. I had myself fooled into thinking I had it all figured out, but in actuality, I was making some serious mistakes that might have cost me everything I hold dear. I am a good student, but I haven't always been very confident and this became abundantly clear my tenth grade year. My dad got a new job and so we had to move and, of course, change schools midyear.

I was excited because I had this figured as the year I could reinvent myself. No one knew me so they didn't know all the stories everyone never forgot at my former school. I surely wasn't a "bad kid," but I wasn't perfect and in my hometown, no one ever seemed to forget. But in my new school, I could be anybody. I fell in with any group of students who wanted to know the "new kid." Sadly, not everyone had good intentions.

I followed whatever crowd would have me. For the first time in my life, I didn't have anyone's expectations to live up to, and I forgot to live up to my own standards. I started hanging out in the hallways with my new friends, trying to clown around and get their attention. I was late to class. I put off doing homework and projects and studying for tests because someone invited me to a rugby match or anything else fun. My grades fell. I wasn't too worried though because I was having so much fun with my so-called friends.

I didn't really see what was going on, but luckily someone else did. That

someone was Mr. B. Mr. B. was my last period teacher and when he was handing out our report cards at the end of the third term, he said "Hey, would you stick around after class for a second?" He was nice enough to take the time to talk to me. I had all the excuses: "it wasn't my fault that I had to move and try to adjust to a new school and all new teachers," I told him. He was smart enough and cared enough to not let me get away with those tired old excuses. He said very straight faced, "excuses weren't the same thing as reasons. Aren't you tired of playing the victim?" He helped me to see that each and every time I was faced with a choice to meet my responsibilities or not, I was the one making the choice, not everyone else. He also made me face the inarguable fact that allowing others to influence me in negative ways had absolutely no consequences for anyone but me.

So if you want things to go very wrong and maybe even lose your good reputation, follow the example I set before I listened to Mr. B. because that day he helped me see the mistakes I was making. If you want your life to go in the right direction, then you need to accept responsibility for your actions. Thanks to Mr. B., I found a new group of friends who encouraged me to do my best and my grades ended up being not quite so disastrous as they would have been if I'd kept on that same path.