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REAL ESSAY EXAMPLES (WITH NOTES)

These essays aren't perfect - but they worked. Each one earned a competitive scholarship or honors admission. What makes them strong isn't the vocabulary - it's the clarity, story, and voice.

Example 1: Leadership Without a Title (Presidential Scholarship Essay)

Prompt: Describe a time you demonstrated leadership.

Why this works:

- Opens with a real moment, not a cliché.
- Shows impact without relying on a formal title.
- Reflects on what leadership meant personally.

Excerpt:

I didn't have a title when I noticed our marching band's newer saxophone players falling behind. I just remembered how overwhelming my own first year was. After rehearsal, I started holding short mini-sessions in the parking lot. We practiced drills, answered questions, and sometimes just laughed. Over time, those same students began leading their own sections. I learned that leadership is less about attention - and more about consistency.

Example 2: Why This Honors College

Prompt: Why do you want to join our honors program?

Why this works:

- Mentions specific academic interests and how the program supports them.
- Connects intellectual curiosity to long-term goals.
- Shows fit - not just admiration.

Excerpt:

I've always been drawn to how biology intersects with vision and perception. The Honors College's focus on undergraduate research, especially in neurobiology, fits directly with my goal of pursuing optometry. I want a college experience that challenges me - not just academically, but with peers who are also driven by curiosity. The idea of contributing to a team-based research project, while engaging in small seminars, feels like the right mix of rigor and support.

Example 3: Overcoming Anxiety (General Scholarship Essay)

Prompt: Describe a challenge you've overcome and what you learned.

Why this works:

- Opens honestly without oversharing.
- Highlights internal growth, not just external results.
- Ends with forward motion - not just resolution.

Excerpt:

My first AP exam felt like walking into a storm with no umbrella. My heart raced, my mind blanked, and I left in tears. That moment could've defined me - but I didn't let it. I reached out to my teacher, learned new study strategies, and started speaking up in class even when I was nervous. I still get anxious. But I've learned how to meet fear with action, and that growth doesn't always look like a trophy - sometimes it looks like showing up again.

