

SAMPLE ESSAY 3

PROMPT: What matters most to you, and why?

A finance PhD aspirant and the anarchist group Chumbawamba may have little in common at first blush. In fact, I was barely out of short pants when their single "Tubthumping" pounded its way into consciousness. I loved cranking up the lyrics with my Delhi school chums and letting the music riff through my head in a throbbing loop:

*"I get knocked down, but I get up again;
you're never going to keep me down!"*

In '97, at the dawn of Internet surfing, I knew nothing about Chumbawamba's chaotic nonconformity and even less of what inspired their lyrics – Merseyside dockworkers vainly railing against both Thatcher and the Labor party they felt had betrayed their cause. For me, the song was always only about never giving up... and that's still what matters most.

I take risks, push boundaries, and set high targets for myself. Like the Liverpool dockworkers, I don't give up easily. My tenacity leads me to achieve goals, but, more importantly, it enables me to examine and learn from my weaknesses. Frequently, I have had to choose between my dreams and taking an easier path. My response to three distinct situations illustrates this life lesson.

As a top-ranked science student throughout high school the world was my oyster. My mind was full of vanities, especially when it came to enrolling in India's premier technical institution, the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Truthfully, I had always viewed cracking their onerous entrance exam a sure bet. Alas, my preparation fell short of the stars in my eyes. I failed the entrance test and was now forced to make a painful decision: I could relinquish my dreams and apply to less lofty schools or wait for another year to re-take the exam. With acceptance rates of just over two percent, the likelihood of IIT accepting me seemed like a far off dream.

My pride prickled each time a classmate announced their college acceptance, but doggedness persuaded me to give my all studying for the IIT test and one more chance at glory. The decision was risky. My parents took turns lamenting, chiding, and spurring me on. But hard work paid off, and I got into IIT the following year. This defining experience taught me that I could reach even the toughest goals when I don't give up. I graduated from IIT at the top of my class.

After IIT, I felt drawn to the world of finance and set my sites on New York

In what ways does this applicant's opening passage capture his reviewers' attention and made them want to read on?

Pause here to identify active verbs that the applicant uses to describe his experiences. Do they help make you feel like you're "inside his head"? Why or why not?

How do these lyrics help to establish the applicant's thesis? What are their metaphorical implications?

Consider three ways in which providing these lyrics and some historical background could influence the minds of the applicant's reviewers.

In what ways does the applicant carry the metaphor through in this passage?

What do these passages reveal about the applicant's personal qualities, his humanity and his growth?

University (NYU) to pursue a master's. For most, getting accepted into the university would represent the thorniest challenge, as NYU's Stern's Finance Department ranks second to none. Acceptance came easy for me, but the big question was how to pay for tuition. My parents could ill afford it, and I had no cosigner in the U.S. to help me get a loan. With "Tubthumping" ringing in my ears, I decided to stick with my dream and save enough money to make NYU mine.

The oilfield service company, Schlumberger, offered me a job with generous wages, and I took it. Friends murmured warnings about the conditions I'd routinely face; none were exaggerated. If you've ever spent a year in a remote jungle outpost like Schlumberger's, you'll get the picture: blistering heat, torrential monsoon rains, and mosquitoes the size of Volkswagens. In spite of having to perform under these and other pressures, I loved the experience. What I actually earned far surpassed any monetary reward; by testing my limits, I honed independence to a fine art. I now knew I could beat any obstacle. Besides, the lifelong friendships I formed through shared adversity still buoy my spirits and spur me to reach higher.

With placement assured, I faced another difficult decision – whether to accept NYU's offer or stay put at Schlumberger with steadfast friends and a fat wallet. By this time, however, going after dreams coursed through my veins like a mighty river. I took the plunge and entered NYU in August of '08 to face the chief financial crisis of this century – at least to date. While I was there, half the New York banks clamped their doors shut, and the other half downsized. My internships were scarce and hard to secure, though drive and hard work continued to serve me well. By the time I got Goldman's full time offer, I'd gained an up-close look at the financial industry with all its warts and wonders and learned the delicate dance of networking for which India had never prepared me. Looking back, I'd change nothing. As the good song goes,

*I get knocked, down but I get up again
You're never gonna keep me down.*

In what ways does using these descriptors strengthen the applicant's essay?
What literary devices has he employed to further persuade his reviewers?

The ability to skillfully employ metaphors and carry them through is a time-tested persuasive technique.
Using your highest qualitative and quantitative meta-analytical skills, number, list and describe all the ways in which the applicant has developed his metaphor.

Would this ending leave the applicant's reviewers with a sense of gratification?
Why or why not?

