

## Personal Insight

### Personal Insight Questions

Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

"Tap-tap-tap-click", the keyboard buttons respond with enthusiasm as they meet my fingers. Their exchanges, an interaction of skin and plastic, birth "`<h1> Liam Llorin: Portfolio`" in a black box on the screen before me. The heading appears on a blank webpage to the right. "What's a portfolio page without photos?" I muse, downloading my Prom portrait onto Imgur. "`<imgsrc=http://i.imgur.com/5Ij.png>`" reproduces my face onto the screen. Not a bad smile if I might say so myself. Next up? This portfolio needs a color scheme. Like lightning amidst a drab night sky, the cherry hue of my bow-tie seizes my gaze. Brilliant! I proceed to concoct CSS color declarations (blood-orange is less demanding on the eyes) for various facets--my subtitles, form buttons, and horizontal navigation bar. Six hours and 511 lines of code later, my labor concludes. My resume-esque webpage, complete with buttons linking to social media, an array of work experience, and a table of coding projects, is a masterpiece of visual interactivity--to me, at least.

I have always sought outlets for creativity. Until middle school, they were an overflowing LEGO bin and a sketch pad; after several years, they matured into an HP Pavilion laptop. Today, the latter fosters my ingenuity. Coding--web design in particular--is my hobby of perpetual learning and perpetual application. It constrains me to flawless syntax, but it gives me breadth to solve problems and personalize composition. My portfolio, my "Llorin Lawn Service" webpage, my 300 completed challenges on freecodecamp.com, a global coding community, are all final products of my unfinalized skill. The creativity lies not in the product; it lies beneath, in the code itself. One line of HTML code is one LEGO brick on a spaceship, one pencil stroke on a still life.

What is the source of my enthusiasm, my thirst for creation? It's the satisfaction when "Oswald" font blends neatly into my layout. It's the pride of witnessing "box-shadow: 10px 10px" provide depth to a side menu. Each "tap" on the keyboard brings me closer to realizing my imagination.

What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

"Quick, get the LEGOs!" I scream in desperation. I hurl Barbie dolls aside, clawing for the beige

carpet that had been visible only hours ago. "It can't end like this," I avow, "Ms. Stevenson cannot see this." The playpen, once spotless, is now in shambles: Xbox equipment piles at the TV stand, miscellaneous costume sets clutter the entrance, overturned containers spew LEGOs and action figures. My world is an inevitable time bomb set to Ms. Stevenson's ETA. Why does her dinner have to end so early?!

"Liam, Max isn't helping clean up!" whines Julia, interrupting my ruminations. Her accusatory finger aims at Max--usually an adorable, gung ho fifth grader--who is now considerably more pouty than his sister. He lies fetal positioned in stubborn rebellion. With the time bomb ticking, I whip out my secret weapon: "I'll give you a Hershey Kiss if you help!" Max's sullen demeanor rejuvenates accordingly. Before I know it, the beige carpet becomes visible in all its glory.

From the chaos of helter-skelter playpens, anarchic pillow fights, and debilitating boo boos, I emerge a battle hardened babysitter. As the jobs and clients pile high, I adapt to newfound horrors of incessant sibling brawls and hostile playtime disagreements. I acquire tricks aplenty--using Siri as a quick-fix distractor, Hershey Kisses as reliable motivators, and "Talent Show" as a game everybody can agree upon. These secret weapons are not shortcuts; they are the tools of my trade.

Indeed, my trade is not a knack of genetic favor. I cultivate patience, tolerance, and flexibility for the whims and wails of younger folk. My role perpetually oscillates between a motivational guru and a referee and a storyteller and a best buddy. But perhaps ubiquitous in my craft, I am a problem-solver. Problems manifest themselves wherever and whenever. My solutions require diversity and dexterity to tackle the most complex of issues, whether in regards to supervision, scheduling, food distribution, argumentation--you name it. Once I concoct the fix, once I clean the playpen and hug the kids goodnight before mommy arrives, I bask in the sweet, savory tang of pride.

Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

"Applications start April 15th". Gaze intent on Amanda, a senior donning an "Applied Physics Laboratory" polo, I scribble down details regarding the logistics of the internship she is presenting. "Own transportation necessary, dress formally, there WILL be an interview"--my pencil dances frantically across the notebook. As Amanda, an APL intern herself, concludes her presentation, I too finalize my notes: "APPLY APPLY APPLY!!!"

Thanks to Amanda's encouragement, the persistence of my advocative internship coordinator, and the timely outreach of an aerospace engineer (my current mentor, Mr. Marshall), I have earned acceptance to the internship at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory. Indeed, most friends usually gawk in astonishment at the title's syllable count. After they inquire, "well, what do you do there?", I respond instinctively.

At APL, I am undertaking a year-long research problem on aircraft flight. I apply my Physics and Calculus backgrounds to the intricate physical realities of stall speed and turbulence to name a few. With a strong STEM foundation, I pour over vector-calculus textbooks and aircraft-related research journals to grasp what more is needed to understand plane behavior. I labor through my daily office hours at APL doggedly, pausing to discuss findings with my mentor (bathroom breaks not excluded). These discussions will often facilitate broader debates and further ideas. Mr. Marshall's breadth of experience in the field spawns lectures ranging from the orbital trajectories of weather satellites to the analysis of two-stage rocket design. I scribble down every word.

Regularly, I exchange my notebook for a laminated "Visitor" pass to tour various facilities on campus. I explore the AeroFuels lab, interviewing engineers on the necessity of chemistry in propulsion. I admire the perfection of cleanrooms, the daunting setup for shock testing--an enormous swiveling steel hammer--in the Spacecraft Fabrication building.

With eyes wide, eyebrows elevated, and jaw dropped I behold it all. I don't view my internship as a chore necessary for securing an A+ grade or a sparkling letter of recommendation or even a definitive research goal. It is much more fundamental than that: my internship is a journey in which learning in itself is the goal.

Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

Early High School paralyzed me. I was stalked by the fear of rejection, a perpetual affliction. Worried about my voice cracking during a Civil Rights debate or being alone in C lunch, I cowered behind a shield of seclusion. My inertia tormented me. These withdrawals--accepting the 0% in participation, starting homework when the lunch bell rang--acted as sabres, not shields, slashing my ego. As my shyness came to a head, I discovered Comfort Zone Challenges. Till Gross's TEDTalk explained a strategy of confronting social anxieties by forcing yourself to do

bizarre and embarrassing things in public. By being vulnerable in public, he reasoned, you were training yourself to overcome your fears.

My first challenge is simple--howl in Barnes & Noble--but its execution sure isn't. I pace between the aisles and cafe, torn. My worries extend to my muted surroundings--to the elderly couple in hushed conversation, to the "Pokemon-Go" fanatics probing the aisles, to the suited businessman sipping coffee. Surely they will be up in arms once I disturb the peace! Summoning strenuous willpower, I quench my misgivings. I inhale... and let loose. "HOWLLLLLLLLL!" I bellow repulsively. The silence returns at once, but not without hair-raising tension. I stand alone. My ears, expecting a harangue of profanity, only detect sighs of irritation as the public pauses in apathetic, not violent, disapproval. Even the expressions of the baristas, which had initially contorted in bitter annoyance, mellow into disregard. As for me, I proceed out the bookstore beaming.

Comfort Zone Challenges have changed me. A product of these therapeutic endeavors is my newfound confidence. If I can howl amidst a silent bookstore, lie in the middle of Baltimore's inner harbor (and New York City's Times Square) for 30 seconds, or do 10 push-ups in a Chipotle line, I can raise my hand in a classroom. This mindset has held fast: whether it be eagerly contributing to an English socratic seminar or leading a Standing Waves presentation in Physics, participation grades have skyrocketed. My involvement reflects my noncompliance with pessimistic worries. I do not shy from the prospect of rejection--even for college admissions.