

Steven Gao
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Fabian AP Lang

Understanding

Steven is staring at his computer screen, doing homework and studying. He has been doing this for a majority of the year. Steven stands up to grab a snack to eat. If 2020 were a normal year, Steven would be at school, and talking to friends and going to clubs in person. He would come home and do homework. 2020 has not been a normal year however, and as a junior in high school, Steven has more work and responsibilities than he has ever had before.

At home, Steven chats and plays games with friends over the internet, but he knows that he has to work on his homework and take care of his responsibilities, too.

With his snack, Steven sits down to take the first class of the day, which is English. In English class, he and his classmates listen to his teacher talk about their latest assignment, the self-profile. Steven tells me that the self-profile has been very difficult for him. After sitting in English class for one and a half hours, he sits through an hour and a half of biology class, where he also sits in front of the computer, except now he's watching videos about biology and does a few activities. After biology class, Steven has lunch. He tells me that he and his friends typically played card games during lunch, but now it's just a rush to finish lunch and be ready for the next class.

After lunch, Steven attends math class, where he and his group mates solve problems. He then goes to physics class. By this time, he is already exhausted from sitting in front of the computer for multiple hours, and he is losing concentration. In one physics class, his classmates, who are mostly seniors, discussed college applications and admissions. From his classmates, Steven heard that waiting for admissions is stressful. Steven knows that next year, he will have to go through the same process, and wonders if he'll do okay. Noticing that his group is off topic,

he tries to put his group back on track and get his group mates to do physics problems, but he everyone is already pretty tired.

Steven tells me that one time, he and his father got into an argument about using algebra in a physics problem when he thought his physics teacher wanted him to linearize a graph visually, as that was the way he had been taught to do it. His father wanted him to look at it from an algebraic perspective. A few days later, Steven decided that he would try to solve the problem using algebra, and discovered that the problem was “much easier to solve”.

“I try not to be stupidly stubborn like that, but sometimes I get annoyed, and I become a little bit defensive,” Steven said. His father has had many encounters with a “stubborn Steven”: “He’s stubborn: if he does things, he insists on doing them the way he’s currently doing them.” His father says that he has been improving at considering others and is becoming more mature: “[Steven is considerate; he] always thinks about other people’s points of view.”

Steven tells me of a time he participated in a program called Destination Imagination. He really wanted to participate in an event where participants built a wooden tower to hold the most weight, because in a previous competition, his team passed that event, but his other teammates wanted to do an event where they would present a skit.

Physics class ends. Steven stands up to stretch, and snags some yogurt from the refrigerator. He starts doing English, biology, math, and physics homework, all on his computer. His mom calls for him to eat dinner.

The next day, Steven is staring at his computer screen again. This time, he’s taking Chinese. Steven’s Chinese teacher is nice, and sometimes, his class sings songs in Chinese together, something we used to do for fun in-class, over Zoom, which is a nightmare, as everyone starts singing at a different time and is out of sync. After Chinese class, Steven has

history class, which is also online. Because history class is at the end of the day, and sometimes the teacher has to talk for long periods of time, Steven is often tired and distracted.

After school, Steven sometimes goes to virtual clubs. Steven tells me that he used to “really enjoy going to clubs,” because he could see his friends and that he participates in the math and science teams. Last year, during Science Olympiad (a competition with many distinct events), Steven participated in Write It Do It, an event where a student writes instructions for his partner to use to build an object. Steven was the one building. “I was pretty sure I did really badly,” Steven remembered, “but I tried hard.” He soon found out he and his partner had actually placed third in that event. Steven has been going to clubs less often this year, finding that he has more work to do and less time to do it.

If he’s not in a club, Steven is trying to focus on completing his enormous amount of homework. He knows that he should work on his homework, but when he thinks about how much homework he has, ends up procrastinating. Steven knows that this is irresponsible, and he is trying to not feel overwhelmed by the amount of work he has. Sometimes, in an effort to be semi productive while still procrastinating, Steven will do math problems or program on his computer.

Steven really enjoys programming. He participated in a programming competition called USACO, and made it to a rank of Gold. His goal has always been to learn about computers and engineering in college, and apply his knowledge to real problems. His father agrees: “[In 5 years, I think Steven will be in] college. A young computer scientist.”

One event that helped Steven develop his love for programming was a LEGO robot building competition where he and his team built a robot to complete tasks. His team also had to present a project about water to judges. He helped with most of the programming and building,

but not as much with the presentation. When it came time to present in front of the judges, Steven tried to hide behind his teammates, but eventually Steven rationalized his fear of presenting in front of strangers, and began presenting the idea.

The next day, Steven tells me, excitedly, “It’s Saturday!” He finds that the weekends are a relief. Steven works on his homework, but also a set of math problems that he has, or a computer programming problem. Sometimes, his mom also asks him to help out with chores. Most of the time, however, you can find Steven on the computer, doing all the work that needs to be done, becoming, as his father would put it, more “mature”. His mother calls for him to help her with a chore outside. Steven puts on his shoes and readies himself to go outside.

Steven,

In most ways, this essay is much like the previous draft you turned in. In reading the second paragraph, I suppose there is a bit more focus on the idea of responsibility, but I still would like to get a clear nut graf with an interpretive thesis that lets me know the unique, interesting thing this essay will prove about Steven. I’m not entirely getting the link between the argument that is getting made and the purpose having to do with maturity. As I mentioned in the draft, I think you could do with less framing. I just seem to be wandering with you through your day. I get that there is some link between the backstories having to do with your stubbornness, but again, a clear thesis would be helpful there, which in turn would help me understand the link between all of that and the frame. The point of the first draft is to write your way to a clear idea; the point of the second is to then really argue that idea. You needed more of a rewrite here.