

ESSAY TOPIC:

Write a short essay on the following topic:

Explain how swimming has developed your leadership skills and describe how you have used those skills in other areas of your life.

I've never been a particularly outstanding swimmer, but I'm also not a terrible one. Though I sometimes feel otherwise, my speed in relation to others has never really been a motivating factor for me. It's more about that feeling at the end of a good practice, when you know you've pushed your hardest and that you'll be sore tomorrow, but proud too. At every practice, I strive to lead others to find this type of motivation, and this leadership at practice has given me the ability to be a leader in my school and community.

Originally, I joined swimming as a therapeutic method for my Cerebral Palsy, a congenital movement disorder, which in me manifests as a very tight calf muscle and inflexible right ankle, making breaststroke very hard and giving me challenges in all of my strokes. When I started swimming, I was surrounded by some incredible role models, a group of girls one year older than me. To my inexperienced eyes, they were incredibly good, but instead of being intimidating, they were completely welcoming. At first, they were much faster than me, but they inspired me to improve, push beyond my weak leg, and helped me with my technique, so that I soon began catching up and even leading sets. Each of these girls set a great example for me to do my best at the sport and encourage others. The friendly competition we found with each other helped us all to swim faster. On tough sets, when we were all struggling, I soon found that a few words of encouragement went a long way, and became the "cheerleader" of our lane, helping the whole lane along as a group. The perseverance I learned from working around my body's weaknesses has also shown me that with hard work, anything is possible.

When high school season came around, I felt immediately out of my depth. The sets were harder, my teammates were faster, and my coach was more intense. However, my same older friends helped me through, and when I was placed in the fastest lane, I found it wasn't as terrifying of a challenge as I had expected. Even though many of the sets were out of my ability, my positive attitude helped my teammates and I through where sheer arm strength wouldn't cut it. Throughout my four high school seasons, I often found myself at the front of a lane, making sure that everyone in the lane knew what was happening and cheering them on when the intervals got tight. My teammates always knew I was someone to count on when they weren't sure of the set or needed some extra encouragement. Leading a lane and keeping track of the clock also taught me incredible organizational skills and focus. As an upperclassman, I've learned to help many younger swimmers with technique or what to do in a swim meet. When my teammates succeed, I feel that we all succeed; I believe that even though swimming isn't technically a "team" sport, the sense of family and camaraderie that a team experiences is what makes it strong. I've always made it a priority to help fellow swimmers who are lost or discouraged, and this year I won the "cheerleader" award for my efforts. This sense of leadership and community is one of my favorite things about the sport.

The skills I've learned from swimming don't just stop on the pool deck. Many of the valuable lessons have had an effect on the rest of my life. Outside of the pool, I am a passionate cellist, and principal cellist of my school orchestra. In a sense, an instrumental section is much like a lane: although there are varying levels of ability, everyone must work in tandem to accomplish a goal. As principal cellist, I am responsible for making sure that all of the other cellists know their parts and play as one body. The leadership skills I learned in the pool of encouragement and help with technique apply directly to orchestra, be it one-on-one tutoring or embodying a strong work ethic for my cellists to copy. It is with great pride that I say the cello section is the strongest section in our orchestra. I am also Orchestra President, meaning the decisions I make about concerts and music choice affect all of my classmates, so I take great care and pride in representing our group.

My leadership skills learned from swimming also have helped me in community service. As Vice President and then President of West High's Interact Club, it has been my job to lead our group in helping the community. Last semester, Interact Club held a sock drive to donate to Covenant House, which was at first rather unsuccessful. After a few weeks of receiving very few socks, I realized we needed to reach out to the community instead of expecting them to come to us. After sending out district-wide announcements encouraging donations, we quickly surpassed our goal of 400 pairs of socks to collect a total of 600 pairs. Without the skills swimming has taught me, our sock drive would not have been successful.

I have been swimming for more than half of my life, and the lessons in leadership I've learned in the pool have aided many other aspects of my life. From cheering on my teammates, to performing with my cello section, to helping my community, swimming has had an incredible impact on me as a person. Although I am excited to go to college and experience many new opportunities, swimming—and the skills it has taught me—will always hold a large influence over my life.