

Note from the Elevated School: this is a review on a former student's draft. They gave us explicit permission to use their work, and we have edited key details for privacy. Note that we will NEVER share your writing or edits publicly without permission.

Student Comments: I've really struggled to understand what Cornell wants in a response, especially what is meant by "Define community in the way that is most meaningful to you." Aside from this, I am looking to really make this essay stand out. I've brought in sharing recipes and tried to keep the primary focus on bridging gaps through translation. I'd also like a grammar polish.

In general, I'd like to know if this writing is driving home a point yet and, if not, how can I make this a standout essay?

We all contribute to, and are influenced by, the communities that are meaningful to us. Share how you've been shaped by one of the communities you belong to.

Define community in the way that is most meaningful to you. This community example can be drawn from your family, school, workplace, activities or interests, or any other group you belong to. (350 words)

“¡Guau! ¡Qué increíble!” the woman responded excitedly, her voice muffled behind the hefty grocery bag I passed through her window. Her mouth widened and eyebrows raised at this fair-skinned, freckle-faced boy speaking her language.

Each week a line of cars, stretching for many blocks, pulls through the Community Crisis Center's driveway. My first week, I rehearsed my good morning speech while walking briskly to each car. I nervously keeping my eyes on the ground and greeting guests with a soft voice. Hearing snippets of Spanish through the windows coming from some cars, the words to respond were buried under the tip of my tongue.

One afternoon, a familiar grey Honda pulled in. “¿Cómo estás hoy?” I asked, the words I wanted to speak beginning to flow. When she asked if I spoke Spanish my response of “me defiando” – “I hold my own” lit her face with a warm smile. The next week when she returned, mystified by the pork tails in her bag, she asked “¿Cómo debo cocinarlos?” – “How should I cook these?” I explained how they could be slowly simmered in a hearty stew, running my finger through the thin pages of a Spanish dictionary to uncover translations for vegetables like butternut squash and collard greens. Each new week while handing out food to guests, puzzling proteins and unique vegetables spark another recipe idea and an opportunity to learn a few more words.

Silenced by imperfections, I stood beside cars unwilling to break a language barrier, embarrassed by my broken sentences and gaps in vocabulary. At the community crisis center, I discovered that the vulnerability of being incorrect or having to search a word is a small price to pay for the connections I've made and recipes shared. I'm eager to build relationships and community with my fellow Cornellians while being my true self.

Comments:

Hey M! So glad to see another one of your Cornell essays! You've got a really solid 75% start to this essay, but I can see what you mean by struggling to "define community" and how you've shaped it. Here's what I can tell with your essay - this Community Crisis Center is one of your communities. It's a place where you get to share your love of food. But a true community is one that where you also learn and grow with, so what feels missing is what you learned from this community, and how they encouraged you to grow.

It seems to me, that your definition of community would click just a bit more, if we got a sense of the back and forth between you and some of the members. Instead of you just sharing recipes, what if sometimes they also shared some with you? And instead of you relying on a dictionary for Spanish words, what if they sometimes corrected you, and then you repeated in English too? Ultimately, that would provide an example of a community where there's a two-way street of learning and support, which I think complements your theme of a community being a safe space where people can learn from one another, and feel safe to stumble and make mistakes through that learning.

So to that end, everything up to the green section is fantastic!! I edited a bit for word count and flow, but you really don't need to touch that. For the green section, I'd suggest adding about 5-6 sentences about how your community started giving you recipes, you asked for words from them instead of relying on your dictionary, and they also learned a bit of English from you. Wrap it up with a concluding sentence on that theme of community sharing and learning and then you're golden!

Last but not least, to help with your writing journey, feel free to check our successful Cornell University example essays! We kindly ask that you do not share this document with others. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Qj9W7rgK6uOufQ1Mpkxt5BN6kiHdAxWzXNa718EY6Wg/edit?usp=sharing>

Given the points above, I'd rate this essay as a **6-6.5/9** in its current stage. It's a really really good essay, but we just really want to stick that dismount and landing (think gymnastics haha).

- For more on rating, please see the [attached rubric](#).
- Please note that our scale is quite harsh – but since 2020, every student with 8+ essays has gotten into a Top 10 school!

Cheers,
Lorna