



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Mistakes Were Made

Taking Responsibility for My Actions



Plot and Ideas

The storyline skillfully establishes an engaging context (“I had been named dance squad captain, and I was enjoying my newfound social status”). The exposition supports the establishment of the plot. Purposeful description builds smoothly toward an exciting climax and thoughtful resolution (“I knew that I would have to spend the rest of my life making it up to him”).



Development and Elaboration

The narrative establishes and maintains a clear, vivid setting. Interesting, engaging characters (“If our high school had royalty, Layla was the Queen Bee”) advance the story and reveal the theme through description (“Even though I knew that I could be kicked off the squad immediately if caught, I barely hesitated”), and reflection (“I heard the words that meant the end of my life as I knew it”).



Organization and Sequencing

The narrative utilizes a clear sequence of events to establish a beginning (“So I was in a hurry to get into school”), middle, and end (“At the end of the night, I did the unthinkable”). Pacing enhances the development of the story and effective transitions signal shifts in time. The resolution offers closure to and reflects on the course of events (“everything that happened was my fault and my fault alone”).



Language and Style

Sensory language (“my stomach quivered” and “spluttered”) is used to clearly convey the narrator’s feelings. Figurative language (“The breathalyzer was the last nail in my coffin”) is employed to create vivid imagery and build a unique voice. First person point of view is well-established and maintained. The narrative employs precise language to create a serious mood (“With genuine dread in my heart”).



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

Mistakes Were Made



Taking Responsibility for My Actions

It would be so easy to excuse myself from my wrongdoing by saying "mistakes were made," and try to push the blame onto other people, but that wouldn't fully express the regret I feel for this one very costly mistake. No matter what the situation, there are almost always multiple factors, but there comes a time when you have to take sole responsibility for your choices.

Thursday dawned like any other day. Recently, I had been named dance squad captain, and I was enjoying my newfound social status at school. So I was in a hurry to get into school when I jumped off the bus and landed in a mud puddle. That should have been a clue that the day might not turn out to be the best! Once I cleaned myself up, I strolled past everyone in the hallways.

"There she goes, the new squad captain," I heard the crowd buzz as I walked toward my locker. One cute senior was definitely checking me out, I realized with a thrill.

"What's up?" I replied to everyone with a careless wave. Everyone seemed to recognize me now, and it felt amazing. I had stopped to talk to a cluster of dance squad members when I heard my name.

"Aurora!" I heard her call. When I realized that it was Layla who was hailing me, I was practically floating with joy. "Are you coming to my party tonight?" she asked.

"You know I'll be there, Layla!" I cheered. If our high school had royalty, Layla was the Queen Bee of them all so I didn't hesitate for a second to say yes. For one second, my stomach quivered at the idea of a party on a school night, but I could handle it, I told myself.

I dressed as carefully that night as I ever had, making sure my skirt was just

right and that I had the perfect, dangling earrings. I knew that this was far more than just a hello in the hallway - this was my chance to belong. When I got to Layla's ultra-modern house that night, I tried to walk in coolly, making sure not to show how important this night was. I made a beeline for Layla and her sidekick. I tapped her on the shoulder, and I was gratified to hear her say, "Aurora, soooo glad you could make it." What she said next made my nerves tingle, though. "Grab a beer from out back," she said casually, as she turned back to her conversation.

As I made my way toward the drinks, I realized that everyone was drinking something. I could see that people were dancing, or making out, and some were smoking. What I hadn't realized before was that not only was this group the most popular and the best-dressed, they were also wild. Out of control wild. When I reached into the icy water and pulled a beer can out, I could see that a few people were watching expectantly. Even though I knew that I could be kicked off the squad immediately if caught, I barely hesitated. While my new friends cheered, I chugged that beer. I choked a bit and spluttered, but then I quickly grabbed another one when Layla encouraged me. As the night went on, I danced and gossiped with everyone and felt like I was accepted by the most popular group... and I drank quite a few beers.

At the end of the night, I did the unthinkable. I picked up my car keys and got in the car and got ready to drive. No one at that party gave me a second look. So I stumbled and weaved a path to my car as I received drunken kisses and mumbled good-byes. I climbed into my car and started the drive home. Just short of the final turn before my development, I saw the flashing lights in my rearview mirror.

With genuine dread in my heart, I pulled over to the side of the road. When I saw the look on the cop's face, I knew I was in serious trouble. Shaking, I pulled out my license and other paperwork and handed them over. Then, I heard the words that meant the end of my life as I knew it, "Can you step out of the car, ma'am?"

I spent the next 30 minutes touching my nose, trying to walk a straight line,

and failing at every attempt. The breathalyzer was the last nail in my coffin. After that, I had to make the call to my parents. I'll never forget the look on my dad's face as he pulled up behind the police car. That look was pure disappointment, and I knew that I would have to spend the rest of my life making it up to him.

I learned that night exactly what it meant to take responsibility for my actions. I lost the trust and respect of the people I care about and the position I had worked so hard to earn. Looking back, I know that mistakes were definitely made in the choices that I made, and I know now that everything that happened was my fault and my fault alone. Popularity isn't worth it if you give up who you really are. Nothing really is.