

Persuasive

In a persuasive essay, a writer tries to convince people that they should feel a certain way about an issue. It begins with a statement about what should happen, followed by strong supporting reasons that back up the assertion. One good way to approach writing a persuasive essay is to mention some opposing arguments and to use rationales that counter them.

Argumentative

Like a persuasive essay, an argumentative essay takes into account both sides of an issue while using examples to show that one is better than the other. However, an argumentative essay is written to convince readers about what is true rather than about what should happen.

Comparison

A comparison essay describes the similarities and differences between things. A writer will use this type of essay to either show that two things that seem to share a lot in common actually have several differences between them, or the opposite—that two seemingly different subjects have many similarities.

Descriptive

Anything can be the subject of a descriptive essay, which doesn't tell a story, but rather paints a picture with words. Writers try to appeal to their readers' senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing) and emotional responses when writing descriptive essays.

Evaluation

An evaluation essay begins with a statement of generally how good or bad something is, then follows up with a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses. It might be written about a movie, book, album, new car, restaurant, or anything that could be the subject of a written review.

Expository

An expository essay explores a subject in depth, which includes describing how people on both sides of the issue feel about it. The writer of the essay should remain objective; in other words, he must try to keep his own opinions out of what he writes.

Literary Analysis

The goal of a literary analysis is to describe what is important to know about a work of literature. This includes writing about the historical context of the work, the author's influences, the connections between it and other works, and the ideas the author relates.

Informative

In an informative essay, a writer uses facts (and ONLY facts) to tell his or her readers about things that aren't common knowledge. Something unusual that happened, an interesting tidbit from history, or the unique way a certain animal behaves are all good topics for an informative essay.

Cause and Effect

A cause and effect essay explains how or why something happens and what occurs as a result. When writing a cause and effect essay it is important to clearly explain the build-up, the event itself, and the aftermath.

Narrative

A narrative essay describes an event. In doing so, it tells a story. It can be written in any tone. When composing a narrative essay, a writer should include good descriptions, interesting details, and quoted conversations when necessary.

Process

A process essay explains anything that is done in steps or stages. It is the "how-to" type of essay. The writer of a process essay tries to imagine the topic from the perspective of someone who knows nothing about it and then, step by step, explains it to the reader.

Persuasive

Our lives have become too safe, too predictable. We work, we eat, we watch T.V. We go with the family on an occasional trip to the nearby theme park for some non-threatening entertainment. What's missing from the lives of us average American citizens? A little good old-fashioned adventure is just what we need.

Why is this necessary, you may ask? Adventures teach us more about the world we live in than any book, T.V. program, or documentary ever could. It is only by getting out into the world around us and getting off the beaten path that we can see new sights and experience new things. This type of adventure can be as complicated as hiking through the rainforest to learn about a completely different ecosystem, or as simple as bypassing the mega-mart and shopping for a meal at a local ethnic grocery store to find out about foods from a different culture.

Adventures are also a great way to learn to be a better citizen of the world. We Americans tend to think of our nation as a safe little island, as unconnected to the rest of the world as our planet is to Mars. The fact is, though, that we are tied to our human brothers and sisters around the globe in countless ways. Going to a different part of the world or even just to a different grocery store and learning to rely on the kindness and expertise of the people we meet is a great way to learn this lesson.

The fact is that nowhere else in the world do average people have as high a standard of living as we do in the United States. The more we go out of our way to meet and spend time with people from other cultures, the more likely we are to find that all around the world, people's basic needs are the same—and they're not always being met. Learning to care about other cultures often means learning to appreciate what we have and wanting to reach out to those who don't have enough.

Need another reason to start becoming an adventurer? How about this—it's fun. Adventures can be sought for the pure enjoyment of the experience. Think about it. What is better: riding the newest roller coaster (which is only slightly different from last year's), being taught a new dance, or trying delicious new food as a guest at a party in another part of the world? .

Some of us like more thrilling adventures, and that's a great reason to look into traveling beyond our own corner of the world. Amusement parks have nothing on oceans, cliffs, mountains, and forests, all of which are teeming with possibilities for thrill seekers.

These are just a few of the reasons that learning to be an adventurer is good for us. Perhaps one of the best things about living an adventure lifestyle is that it doesn't have to be done at a special time, and it doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Simply going out of our way to see a different part of town and try a new experience can be all it takes to learn, grow, and have more fun than we thought possible on an ordinary day.

Argumentative

In May of 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first two people to climb the highest peak in the world: Mt. Everest. They were not merely the first to climb it successfully but the first to climb it period.

I stress this because there seems to be some disagreement on the issue. Today, Hillary and Norgay top the list of people most associated with Mt. Everest. Before them, however, another name was the first to come up in discussions of the mountain—George Mallory—who was one of the first people to attempt to climb it. He lost his life on his third journey up the slope.

Along with Guy Bullock, his climbing partner, Mallory reached the first record height on Mt. Everest: 7000 feet on May 21, 1921. He was a key member of two more expeditions to the peak of Everest, the last of which took place in June of 1924. It was on this last attempt to reach the summit of the mountain that Mallory died, as did his partner, Andrew Irvine. They appear to have been roped together at the time of a fall, most likely before they successfully reached the top.

However, to this day, there are people who would like to make the case that Mallory actually did succeed in being the first person to see the world from the top of Mt. Everest. They are wrong to do this for several reasons.

First, there is simply no hard evidence that it is true. Those who would argue that Mallory and Irvine reached the summit rely mostly on the fact that it is *possible*, not on actual proof. There are a couple of details about Mallory's gear that seem to suggest he was on the way back down the mountain when he died, but they are easily explained in other ways. The bulk of what evidence there is shows that it is not likely that they made it all the way to the top. Furthermore, most of their fellow mountaineers agree that it probably didn't happen.

But, for the sake of argument, let's say that Mallory and Irvine were on their way back down the mountain when they perished. Does this change the fact that the distinction of being the first to climb Mt. Everest should go to Hillary and Norgay? Shouldn't the people who get to claim that honor actually have lived to tell about it? This may sound callous, but the fact is that making it to the top of the mountain is only half of the climb. Furthermore, it takes away from everyone's legacy—Mallory's and Irvine's, *and* Hillary's and Norgay's—to suggest that the earlier expedition actually succeeded in reaching the top of the mountain. This is because discussions on the matter, which almost always end with people agreeing that Mallory and Irvine weren't successful in reaching the summit, highlight what those great explorers *didn't* do instead of their many accomplishments.

These conversations also cast a shadow of doubt over the amazing achievement of Hillary and Norgay. Without evidence to the contrary, they deserve to claim that they

were the first to reach the top of Mt. Everest without needing to add *successfully* or *that we know of*.

Comparison

It's time to plan your vacation. When you get to your destination, which would you like to see waiting for you: a hammock tied between two palm trees or a rope to guide you up the face of a mountain? Would you rather pack hiking boots or flip-flops?

If you picked the flip-flop type of vacation, you might have what is called a "Type B personality." If hiking boots are more your style, you could have considered a "Type A personality."

These terms came into being in the 1950s. The phrase "Type A personality" was coined as the result of a study to determine what personality traits are common in people who are susceptible to heart disease. Type B characteristics are the opposite of Type A characteristics.

The study found that Type A personality people are extremely driven to succeed and live their lives at an accelerated pace. A Type A person pushes himself or herself to achieve and is likely to be a perfectionist. These kinds of people are highly competitive and typically handle defeat with great difficulty. They also can be very impatient and hostile to others when things don't go their way.

There are several good things about being a Type A personality. People belonging to that group tend to get a lot accomplished and perform high-quality work. They are also the kinds of people who dream big and achieve amazing things.

Unfortunately, there is a downside. Since these type of people push themselves to accomplish tasks, they can easily expect too much of themselves and become discouraged if the tasks do not turn out as they desire. Everyone experiences frustration from time to time, and being able to deal with it in a positive way is important to both mental and physical well-being.

By contrast, Type B personalities are experts at handling disappointing circumstances. They tend to take life as it comes, both the good and the bad. "Easygoing" is a term you would probably hear used to describe a person from this category. Patience comes to them easily, and defeat is typically taken with a grin.

There are, of course, some negative associations with having *only* Type B traits. It is not unusual for these people to struggle to get started on a task, to remain focused on it, and to see the importance of finishing it in a timely manner. Whereas true Type A personalities will probably have all of their material needs met and then some, people who have no Type A characteristics at all may find themselves periodically out of work and unable to pay the bills.

The theory that people with Type A personalities are more likely to develop heart disease has since been found to be invalid. However, these terms are still in use to describe a drive to achieve or lack thereof. If nothing else, figuring out whether you are a Type A or a Type B is a good way to determine what you need to adjust in your approach to life in order to become a more well-rounded person.

Descriptive

I've seen mountains before and have driven on my share of winding hills, but the Rocky Mountains of Colorado still seem more like a strange and pleasant dream to me than a real life experience.

Driving through the mountains, the scenery was both tranquil and invigorating, but the best word to describe it is probably surreal. I had the feeling that if my passenger and I had parked the car to explore our surroundings, they would vanish before our eyes like a mirage and be replaced by flat, featureless land. Everywhere we looked, magic was taking place; nature was winking at us and daring us to get out and join in the fun.

The hills on either side of us were etched with countless natural steps, each of which seemed to host its own spectacular nature show. Driving through on a hot June day, we were amazed to see piles of fluffy white snow dotting the rock formations. There were pine trees and intermittent cascading waterfalls. I picture various wild animals pausing at these streams to take a drink, but I'm sure—*fairly* sure—that's only a trick of memory.

The approach to the Rockies was the opposite of this whimsical scene. Stark, vast, and rising to the heavens, the mountains seemed waiting to tolerate our presence if we were lucky and to toss us back down to earth if we weren't.

My previous experience driving in mountainous regions was that the landscape changed from flat to hilly very gradually. My passengers and I would cruise along enjoying the strange and beautiful scenery. Suddenly, we found that level ground was hundreds of yards below us. Then, the beauty of the drive would give way to a heightened sense of anxiety as we realized that veering off the road meant more than a frightening experience.

Driving in the Rocky Mountains was the opposite of this. The nerve-wracking part of the journey was the approach to the magnificent rock formation before us, which appeared as if it could swallow us whole and leave no trace that we ever existed.

Ironically, this feeling of apprehension melted away when we found ourselves at the highest point of our journey. We were surrounded not by dangerous drop-offs, but by the fairytale-like landscape described above. For a fleeting moment, it seemed as if we might have wandered onto a road that led to heaven itself.

Evaluation

Movies that appeal to a mass audience are usually summer blockbuster-types. They are either packed from beginning to end with explosion-filled action or zany physical comedy. Their purpose is to wash over the audience for a couple of hours, leaving them entertained but not necessarily deep in thought.

The Hudsucker Proxy is different. It's a movie that can be enjoyed by people from a wide range of ages and interests, but it's also a smart piece of filmmaking.

It's the story of Norville Barnes, a young man from Muncie, Indiana, who moves to New York City with little but his dreams in tow. Through an incredible chain of events, he quickly finds himself the head of a major corporation.

His meteoric rise to fame is due, in part, to an invention. People routinely mock him when he shows them his idea, but when he's finally in a position to get it made, it becomes a huge success.

Unfortunately, forces are working against Norville, and his stay at the top doesn't last long. He quickly finds himself losing all he had gained and then some. It is then that he learns what real success is based on, and he begins his climb once more.

It is a sleek, stylish movie that has a very simple plot, but at the same time is loaded with the type of juicy details that a class of film students would have a wonderful afternoon discussing. The movie's filmmaker brothers, Joel and Ethan Coen, pack it with their trademark "another time, another place" appeal. Skillful comic touches and very little objectionable content make it the sort of movie kids and parents can enjoy together. Maybe.

Though *The Hudsucker Proxy* can appeal to a diverse audience, that never seems to be the Coen brothers' biggest concern. Some people may find the touches of humor too subtle or the 1950s setting too hard to identify with.

But, for those who are getting tired of films that are little more than a showcase for over-the-top special effects and gross-out gags, *The Hudsucker Proxy* may be just the movie to pop in and invite the family to watch.

Expository

In July of 1969, the world held its breath. Three American astronauts had been sent on a mission to do something that had never been done before—set foot on the surface of the moon.

If they were successful, America (in its own opinion) would win the so-called “space race” against its then rival, the Soviet Union. The Communist nation had beaten the USA to many other firsts, but had yet to successfully land on the moon—the “summit” of space exploration.

Aside from showing up a political rival, Americans, and citizens of the world in general, would gain something else. Exploring the earth has been a favorite pastime of humans since the dawn of mankind. In the mid-twentieth century, however, it seemed like there was not much new to discover on our own planet. Most of the land had already been mapped out. The tallest mountain heights had been reached, as had some of the deepest realms of the seas. We began to look to the skies for our next great conquest.

The success of the Apollo 11 mission on July 20 and 21, 1969, did indeed capture the imagination of the world. For the first time, it was possible to know just what was up there, to see it for ourselves on video and to hear about it through the accounts of the astronauts.

However, not everyone shared in the sense of excitement and awe. Even at the time that mankind was making incredible advances in space exploration, there was a large segment of the population that thought the pursuit was foolish. Many Americans felt that the money and effort spent on the space program should have been used to benefit mankind more directly. They objected to the thought of tax money being used to fund a project that would have little impact on their daily lives.

Fast forward to today, and both things are still standing: the space program and the opposition to it. While the “space race” has long since ended, American and international space programs continue to spend a great deal of money on space exploration, with the United States clearly leading the group.

Currently, the United States is also involved in a war against Iraq and is suffering an economic slump. In a time when nightly news programs report on deaths and injuries that befall our soldiers due to a lack of sufficient armor, rising gas and food prices, and the poor state of our economy in general, many people don’t support spending billions of dollars on the space program. They do not feel that the program is doing any practical good.

There are numerous ways, of which we are mostly unaware, that the space program does impact our daily lives. Technologies developed to further space missions are being used in our homes, schools, and places of work every day. Satellites, for example, allow us to do everything from track dangerous storms to enjoy television and are a product of space exploration. The simple computer would likely not be so “simple” if it weren’t for its important place in space programs.

Those facts are little consolation to the people who feel as if they are literally watching billions of their dollars being sent into space at a time when money is needed so badly

here on earth. Their feelings range from wanting the U.S. to scale back spending on the space program to calling for it to be scrapped altogether.

What about mankind's need to explore? If we cut off our ability to find out what lies beyond the land we know, will we be denying a basic human need? Is discovery, in and of itself, something we as a species must do in order to thrive? That certainly seems to have been the case up until now.

It may be that we will never be rid of this drive to discover. Then again, it may be that learning to want to use our resources for feeding, clothing, and caring for our fellow human beings truly is the "last" frontier.

Literary Analysis

"Ladies and gentlemen." Living in 21st century America, we are mostly familiar with this phrase as the beginning of a speech or announcement. In mid-19th century England, however, the words had a much deeper meaning.

This is especially true for Phillip Pirren, better known as Pip. He is the protagonist of Charles Dickens's 1860s literary classic *Great Expectations*. Born into a serving class family and orphaned at a young age, Pip glimpses the lives of ladies when he visits a manor house his older brother-in-law has been hired to do work on.

Miss Havisham is the "lady" of the house. An aging, jilted bride (who continues to wear the bridal gown she donned just before being left at the altar), she delights in watching as her young ward Estella toys with Pip's emotions. Even as a boy, he falls deeply in love with the girl. Though the pair of females takes pleasure in treating him badly, Pip's only dream is that Miss Havisham, the mistress of the house, will make him a proper "gentleman" so that he may one day marry Estella.

Pip is enchanted by all that the upper class represents. He believes that the wealth and education he lacks, which are the key to gaining the status of *gentleman*, are the only things standing between him and happiness. He is focused on one thing and one thing only: climbing the social ladder.

Through the help of an unknown benefactor, Pip's dream becomes a reality. He receives a large sum of money and an education. His days as a member of Britain's lower classes become a quickly fading memory.

The view from the top, though, isn't exactly what Pip thought it would be. The girl he loved so desperately still marries someone else. The money he received came with potentially dangerous strings attached. The money does him very little long-term good anyway; unaccustomed to handling a large fortune, he spends haphazardly and is quickly left with nothing.

However, even as Pip gains and loses the status of gentleman, he develops in a way that is much more important. He begins to see the class system for what it is. He finds that there is nothing inherently good about being a “lady” or “gentleman.” He learns that the qualities which really make a person good are not wealth and education, but rather, kindness and humility.

Charles Dickens lived in Pip’s society, and his writings often challenged the social conventions of the time. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens shows how the snobbery of the upper classes plays a large role in keeping members of the lower classes miserable. In *A Christmas Carol*, he contrasts Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy but joyless man, with his employee Bob Cratchit, a poor man who nonetheless finds a great deal in life to celebrate.

Great Expectations takes the lesson one step further. It shows how aspiring to be wealthy and respected can be a recipe for failure, while striving to simply be a better person is a sure path to success in life. It also shows how that success should be measured—not by a large bank account and all the material comforts money can buy, but by the amount of love a person shows and receives in turn.

Informative

It all started with a nickel.

That was the first profit a six-year-old Warren Buffet made by selling bottles of soda to his friends. Today, he is the richest man in the world.

At an early age, Buffet showed an interest in—and talent for—making money. The soda venture led to other pursuits, including purchasing a pinball machine with a friend when they were in high school. They made enough money from it to eventually buy two others. He had already made a nice profit from a paper route at that time—more than \$42,000 by today’s standards.

Buffet would eventually make the bulk of his money in the stock market. He purchased his first shares at eleven years of age. He sold the shares quickly, pocketing a profit of two dollars apiece for three shares. He would eventually see the stock rise to over five times its original worth. The lesson he learned from this would prove more valuable than the money he made.

After graduating from college, Buffet got married and experienced the only real lean times that would come in his life. He and his wife lived in a mice-infested apartment, and when their first baby came along, she reportedly slept in a dresser drawer. Eventually, Ben Graham, one of Buffet’s former professors and a man he considered his personal mentor, gave him a job with one of his investing partnerships.

Buffet made one highly successful business decision after another, turning each profit into an opportunity to make even more money. Throughout his career, he has displayed an uncanny ability to know how and when to invest. By the age of 32, he had over \$1,000,000. This was in 1962, when that amount of money was an almost unfathomable amount for an average person.

That same year he would begin buying stock in a company called Berkshire Hathaway at around eight dollars a share. He would later go on to take over the company, and it is his main business venture to this day. Its stock was worth \$120,000 a share as of July 1, 2008. He is personally worth over \$62 billion.

One might think that the richest man in the world would own magnificent homes in every corner of the world with servants at the ready to cater to his every whim. This is not Buffet's lifestyle. He is known for living a relatively frugal way of life.

He doesn't see his fortune as something to be used up for his own enjoyment, but rather plans to donate a great portion of it to organizations that help people in need. In 2006, he announced that he was giving approximately \$30 billion worth of Berkshire Hathaway stock to charitable organizations, the largest part going to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft and a close friend of Buffet's, is now the third richest man in the world (having been replaced by Buffet himself).

Warren Buffet doesn't plan to stop there. When he passes away, most of his fortune will go to charity, with only enough being passed on to his children to keep them comfortable. Buffet aims to be remembered as more than just the richest man in the world. His legacy is one of talent, hard work, and—most importantly—an understanding that money does the most good when used to help those in need.

Cause and Effect

The atmosphere is constantly pushing down on us. It is what keeps our feet firmly anchored to the ground.

The higher one goes, however, the less atmospheric pressure there is. This means that the air is thinner and lighter in mountainous areas than it is in places that are at sea level.

In places where the atmosphere is thinner, air bubbles weigh less; therefore, they rise to the surface of heated water more quickly than they would at a lower elevation. The temperature at which water boils, or boiling point, is lower the higher you go. This makes cooking in mountain towns tricky for people who aren't used to doing so.

The lowered boiling point means that it takes some dishes longer to cook than it would in areas that are closer to sea level. While water actually boils more quickly, it is boiling at a lower temperature, which means food needs to stay in hot water or other cooking liquids longer than it normally would.

Baking can be even trickier. Most recipes for cakes, cookies, pies, breads, and muffins were created for people close to sea level. Baking these same recipes in mountainous areas, where the atmospheric pressure is lower, can affect the outcome in several ways.

Doughs and batters rise more quickly because the gases trapped inside of them require less time and heat to expand. Dishes don't cook as evenly and can dry out more rapidly. It can be difficult to obtain the nice, golden crust on the outside of baked goods that makes them look so appealing.

Some recipes come with recommendations for cooking at high altitudes but many don't. It is often up to each individual chef or baker to figure out how to adapt for the challenges their environment creates.

Learning how to cook at any altitude is part science and part art. This is no more true than when preparing dishes at higher elevations. It takes a little knowledge of science to know what's going to happen when the heat meets the food and why. It also takes a good deal of artistry to learn to work with nature's curveballs to create dishes that are delicious and unique, taste sensations that are only possible when cooking in the clouds.

Narrative

For the first time, I knew I was far from home.

Illinois had its share of parks and hiking trails, but they were nothing like what I was experiencing on the Los Angeles coast. I was facing hilltops to be mounted, ravines to be explored, and the possibility of—it's true—*being attacked by mountain lions!*

Ok, so that part was really more exciting than frightening. The nightly news was routinely free of stories about indigenous feline attacks, so we weren't too worried about them. Plus, there were signs posted all along the trails advising us on how to behave should a mountain lion cross our path, and if the government of the state of California thought that was precaution enough, that was fine with us. Knowing that it would probably never happen, we enjoyed our treks through the gorgeous scenery a mere ten miles from our cozy urban apartment—partly because of the possibility of meeting up with such a creature.

But a life-or-death challenge would come, and in a form I didn't expect: a rock.

On one of our hikes, a ten-foot tall boulder was the only thing keeping us from continuing on our path. I don't know why we didn't consider that a great place for us to call it a day and head back, but there we were, actually trying to *climb* the thing! A tattered, knotted rope hanging down the side of rock was proof that this was what people typically did on that portion of the hike, and I suppose we thought ourselves just as

capable as anyone. My friend Jay went first and, unsurprisingly, handled the challenge just fine.

I first met Jay when we were in the same fourth grade class. Even back then, our future athletic ability seemed set. He could do all of the chin-ups, sprints, and rope climbing that those humiliating P.E. physical fitness tests required. My body was much more trained for the task of sitting on a couch reading *Mad* magazine. When it was my turn at the pull-up bar, I would strain every muscle in my body and not move one iota. I thought I detected a hint of disgust behind every “C” for effort the gym teacher gave me.

But there I was, and it was my turn to climb.

Jay cheered me on: “Yeah—look at you go! Woo-hoo!!! You got it; just one more step!”

To this day, I have no idea how I did it, but in about a minutes’ time and without major embarrassment, I had succeeded in what was by far my most demanding physical challenge to date. I was standing on top of the boulder, and anything seemed possible except, perhaps, getting down the rock.

Even as I stood on the “summit” of my great victory in the battle of man (or, in my case, young woman) vs. nature, I wondered how on earth we would climb the thing in reverse. Getting up didn’t seem too bad; trying to descend, on the other hand, would mean that one false slip could spell doom. Plus, I’m sure a lot of my reaching the top had to do with the fact that Jay was waiting there to help pull me to safety. Pulling me anywhere would be the *last* thing I’d want on the climb down.

When we reached the rock on our return journey, it was about an hour later, and we were physically exhausted. The challenge seemed more insurmountable than ever. There we stood at the top, and the rope that held the promise of success on our way up now seemed to dangle perilously, ending somewhere we couldn’t quite see. Rock surrounded us on all sides.

Gone was Cheerleader Jay, the one who had helped me up the rock. In his place was someone who was only half-convinced of making it down himself and who meekly tried to assure me that it was possible.

“It’ll be fine...you can do it,” he offered half-heartedly.

“I don’t know...I don’t think I can. I really don’t,” was my sober assessment of the situation.

I made up my mind to send Jay to get Mountain Rescue. Mentally, I prepared myself to be the person on the news who had to be air-lifted to safety (now those stories we *had* seen).

Just as I was about to reveal my new plan to Jay, hope arrived. It came in the form of the Marines—three of them, anyway. They weren't on assignment or anything; they were there, as we were, for enjoyment. Only, for them, this truly was a relaxing experience. They bounded across the rugged terrain with the assuredness of, well, mountain lions.

They readily agreed to help us get to safety. Again, I don't remember the specific climb down the rock, except for the fact that one step ahead of me was a thickly muscled member of the United States Armed Forces prepared to act as a block between myself and the unyielding ground.

As I look back at that adventure, there are two things that amaze me. The first is that I was able to climb the rock, a physical feat I did not know I was capable of. The second is that, in my moment of extreme need, help came in the form of a trustworthy guide and human safety net.

I actually think I like the second occurrence better. I'm not nearly as in awe of my own strength as I am of life's ability to sometimes provide us with just what we need when we need it, often in the form of a good-hearted stranger.

Process

Surviving high school can, at times, appear to be a monumental task. There are so many difficulties that can creep up along the way, and any one of them can seem like too much to handle. Long assignments, difficult classes, friend problems, and tough choices both inside and outside of school are all common problems for teenagers.

The good news is that most students do indeed survive, and a lot of them even make it to graduation with plenty of fond memories of their high school days. There are a few simple steps to follow to make sure that your time as a secondary student is as manageable, and even as fun as possible.

One of the first adults you'll meet at your high school will be your guidance counselor. He or she is responsible for assisting you in picking the classes that will help prepare you for your future as an independent person. Your guidance counselor should also be able to point you in the right direction if you're having problems in any other area of school or life in general. Don't be afraid to make an appointment to speak to this person whenever you need to.

Be sure to share whatever you need to with the guidance counselor. If you're afraid that you won't do well in a certain class, let him or her know why this is. The solution may be as simple as tutoring, but it also may turn out that you need to switch classes. Don't be afraid to ask; your guidance counselor's job is to help you with just such issues. On the other hand, if you feel your classes aren't challenging enough, let him or her know this as well and ask to discuss your options.

Whether you are concerned or just there to pick classes, write down everything you'd like to discuss with your guidance counselor before your appointment. This will help you to be sure that nothing is forgotten, and you will leave your meeting feeling better about what was discussed.

It may be that there is a teacher or another professional at the school with whom you feel very comfortable sharing your concerns. Don't hesitate to do this—that's a part of that person's job, too. However, you should realize, that often the best way he or she can help is to point you in the direction of someone else you can trust with a certain problem.

For many students, navigating high school's tricky social waters is an even greater concern than classes are. There are several things that can make this easier. First, join an extra-curricular activity or sport for fun and to meet other students who share your interests. Most schools have a wide variety of activities to choose from, or you may look in your community for programs designed for people your age.

The important thing is that you find an activity *you* enjoy. This leads to the next tip: be yourself. It can be tempting to try to adopt other kids' styles, attitudes, and behaviors in order to fit in. However, this is rarely the way to make good friends—the kind who like you for you, share your joys, and make difficult times easier. There's nothing wrong with liking the same things other people like; in fact, common interests help make friendships strong. It's important, though, that you be true to your own thoughts and feelings and not try to put on an act to impress others.

On the other hand, remember that there is always room for self-improvement. As essential as it is for you to love and accept yourself just the way you are, it is equally important for you to realize that everyone can and should learn new ways to be more helpful and caring.

One good way to start is to try not to fall into the trap of putting other people down. Keep in mind that you can never know what is going on in peoples' lives to make them act the way they do. Someone who seems rude, obnoxious, mean, or even just a little strange is probably a person who could use your kindness more than anyone else. And remember—no amount of mean-spirited comments about someone else can ever make you a better or happier person.

Forging your way in life in general is easier if you like who you are, reach out to others when necessary, and always strive to be a better person. The earlier you can learn to do these things, the better off you'll be. High school is the perfect time to work on making these things a priority. Years later, when you think back on this challenging and exciting time in your life, you'll be glad you did.