

Springfield High School Senior Brag Sheet

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Tips for completing this sheet:

- *Give as much detail as possible. This includes spelling out your awards and activities instead of using acronyms.*
- *Include all your responsibilities, achievements, and activities – not just ones from school.*
- *Be honest!*
- *Take your time. Colleges are looking for good writing and thoughtful answers. If you fill this sheet out carefully, you can use it as a starting point for your college applications.*

Please answer as many questions as possible to best help your guidance counselor.

1. What sets you apart as an individual?

I am autistic. I have an excellent memory, intense focus, and a burning desire to learn. I am a very internally motivated person. I have strong interests, and I pursue them passionately, which has taught me great research skills. Sometimes people are surprised by the way I think and speak, but I am always very precise and direct. I have found that I have a natural talent for scientific writing.

2. How have you contributed to your school community?

When I was a freshman, I was disappointed that our high school had no science fair, so I started the science club and helped plan and organize our first science fair. At first, the club was very small – just two members and the teacher who sponsored us.

But the science fair was very successful. Lots of students participated, and the club got bigger every year. Now, the club that I started has 13 members. Last year, our school sent two students to the regional science fair in Virginia. (I was one of them.) In science club, we invite professors to give us talks, go on field trips, and also give presentations on our own personal areas of interest. The science club offers a chance for people in all grades to meet each other, teach each other, practice important skills, and learn about new areas of science.

3. What are your hobbies or interests? Give at least three.

I am very interested in collecting fossils. When I touch teeth or bones left behind millions of years ago, I feel inspired by how huge the scope of time is.

I am also extremely interested in astronomy. I have not had the chance to take a class in astronomy, although I would like to explore that in college. A friend from the science club introduced me to stargazing. Looking at the stars and reading about the most amazing places in the universe makes me realize how gigantic it is.

Lastly, I enjoy reading about psychology. When I was younger, I had a very hard time understanding a lot of social cues and situations, but embracing my autism and learning to understand myself has helped me learn about other people too. Fossil collecting and astronomy make me think about how amazingly huge the universe is and how small I am. Thinking about the human mind and all it's capable of make me realize that my place in the universe is special too.

4. What is your favorite academic subject? Why?

My favorite subject is science. So far, my favorite class has been AP Environmental Science. This class has been very rewarding for me because it is so expansive. Reading about incredible animals and biomes from all over the world has increased my passion for learning about nature, and studying the consequences of human actions has inspired me to make changes to my daily life. Learning about the environment lets me connect the big picture of the natural world to my everyday decisions.

5. Describe and explain your pride in one accomplishment while at Springfield High (it could be a project, a paper, working diligently to learn a difficult concept, learning how to work collaboratively, or anything else you're proud of).

At the beginning of this year, I did a research project and presentation for my honors psychology class about autism. Before my presentation, some of my classmates did not know that I was autistic. In the past, I had been afraid to tell people because I didn't know how they would react, but over the last few years, I have learned to embrace myself and my autism. It comes with both challenges and strengths. I encouraged my classmates to ask questions, and a lot of them did. Some people in my class had misconceptions about autism, but speaking out made me realize they were all interested in learning more. I'm proud that I was able to spread understanding by sharing my experiences and knowledge.

6. What would your teachers say is your greatest strength?

My teachers would say that my greatest strength is my focus. I like to work on a project until it's completely finished, and I like to know everything I can about a subject that interests me. When I'm engrossed in learning something, I cannot be distracted or deterred.

7. Give five adjectives or phrases that help describe you as a person.

Determined, focused, organized, curious, honest

8. What honors and awards have you won?

Science Department Student of the Year, 2012
First Place, Springfield High Annual Science Fair, 2013

9. What extracurricular activity has been most important to you? Why?

The science club has been very important to me. I founded it, and through it I have met several very good friends. I've learned a lot about astronomy, paleontology, and environmental science from the other students in the club. I have also learned a lot about giving effective presentations and organizing events. The club is meaningful to me because I have been able to get to know others through common interests, expand my understanding of the world, and spread excitement about science to other students.

10. Discuss an event in your life that has had a major impact on you, your life, and your academics.

Being diagnosed with autism was a major event in my life that affected me emotionally and academically. Before I was diagnosed, I knew that I was different but I didn't know why. Immediately after my diagnosis, I was distressed because I realized that I would never be just like other kids. I wanted to fit in very badly, and that was hard for me. Over time, my parents helped me adjust, and

gradually I realized that it was okay to be different. I started reading about autism and realized, for the first time, that there were other people like me in the world. That felt good, and I wanted to know more. Before I knew I was autistic, I hadn't always done well in school even though I felt like I was trying very hard. Once we knew about autism, my parents and doctors worked with me to help me understand my needs. My teachers started working with me in a way that I could understand, and I started to work harder because I knew that I could succeed. I finally believed in myself. I became more dedicated to school. Sometimes it's hard to learn differently than my classmates, but I know that the challenges I've been through have taught me perseverance and dedication. I am proud of who I am.

11. Describe your family (parent occupations, parent or sibling education, any special circumstances, etc.).

My father is a lawyer and my mother is a network administrator. I have one younger sister. She is neurotypical, and I have learned a lot from watching her grow up. We're pretty close even though she's four years younger than me. She was the first person I ever tried to explain autism to, and she has always accepted me. Talking to her helped give me the confidence to talk to others and try to help them understand me.

12. Have you decided on your college major or future career? If so, what is it?

I have not decided exactly what I want to major in. I know that I want to be a scientist. I would like to have a career in research. I think that my focus and intensity make me an ideal person to work in a lab and to devote my life to a better understanding of the natural world. I have a talent for research and scientific writing. I pursue knowledge with a passion, and I never give up. I know that I can succeed in a college level STEM program and a career in the sciences.

13. What are your personal goals?

I am very interested in learning about and getting to know other people. I also really care about helping others. During the past year, when I started to be more open about my autism at school, I became very aware of the need for advocacy and awareness. One thing I would really like to do in college is to reach out to a larger campus to help spread awareness and understanding for students on the spectrum. My personal goal is to be a role model for younger students with autism and to help non-autistic people understand their fellow students better.

14. Write something about yourself that your counselor doesn't know, that would help in writing recommendations.

I definitely have a type A personality. I like having a schedule and knowing what will happen, which makes me a very organized person. I am extremely detail-oriented, and I care deeply about doing my absolute best work. Sometimes I'm my own worst critic, but it makes me even more focused on my goals. I am also an extremely honest person. In the past, some of my friends have said that social interactions would be easier if everyone were as clear and honest as me. I pride myself on being truthful and trustworthy. I would bring a unique perspective to any college community.