

Prompt: Write me a college essay between 600 and 650 words in response to this prompt: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

****Title: The Power of Persistence: Overcoming Failure in the Pursuit of Growth****

Failure is often considered a stepping stone to success, but the path to understanding this concept is rarely straightforward. In my case, a setback during my junior year of high school—a failure to make the varsity soccer team—was an experience that forced me to reevaluate my understanding of success, perseverance, and self-worth. It reshaped not only my approach to challenges but also how I viewed myself and my potential.

Soccer had been a central part of my life since I was a child. By the time I reached high school, I had honed my skills through years of practice and played in competitive leagues, believing that my dedication and experience would be enough to secure a spot on the varsity team. I trained relentlessly over the summer, improving my endurance, technique, and understanding of the game. When the tryouts came, I felt confident—perhaps even overconfident. But when the list of players selected for the varsity team was posted, my name was absent. The sting of rejection hit harder than I had anticipated. I questioned my abilities, wondered if I had worked hard enough, and feared that this failure marked the end of my soccer career.

In the weeks that followed, the weight of the setback lingered. For a time, I considered quitting soccer altogether, believing that maybe I wasn't as talented as I thought. But as time went on, I realized that the real lesson was not in the failure itself but in how I responded to it. The rejection provided an unexpected opportunity to grow. I could either allow it to define me negatively or use it as motivation to improve. After some reflection, I chose the latter.

I decided to focus on developing the areas where I had been weak—my footwork, my decision-making under pressure, and my mental toughness. I sought feedback from my coaches, spent hours watching game footage, and committed myself to refining my technique. I also took a different approach to practice: rather than solely focusing on physical skills, I worked on building my mental resilience. I learned that becoming better at something requires not just physical effort but also the capacity to handle disappointment, learn from mistakes, and persevere through setbacks.

When the next season's tryouts came around, I entered with a different perspective. I was not focused on the outcome—whether I made the team or not—but rather on the progress I had made and the growth I had experienced. In the end, I did make the varsity team, but more importantly, I had developed a deeper understanding of what it means to succeed. I learned that success is not just about winning or achieving immediate goals; it is about persistence, adaptability, and resilience in the face of failure.

That experience taught me several important lessons that have shaped my approach to other challenges in life. First, I learned that failure is not final—it is an opportunity to assess, adapt,

Commented [1]: This title is quite impersonal and sounds more like the title of a self-help book.

Commented [2]: Opening with generic sweeping statements rarely captures the reader's attention. Given that the assignment is to write a personal statement, opening with the writer's firsthand experience is stronger -- perhaps a scene of the author scanning for their name on the list of players posted after tryouts and experiencing disappointment. I would also advise against opening with a summary of the essay's thesis and instead building toward that takeaway.

Commented [3]: What age? The reader jumps from childhood to high school in a flash, making it hard to feel the author's connection to sustained involvement. "Years of practice" is so vague.

Commented [4]: This essay has a kind of AI hollowness characterized by lack of specific details. What was the experience of first kicking a ball like, for example? What does it look like to "train relentlessly"? When "the sting of rejection hit harder," how did the author comfort themselves -- did their favorite snack of Oreos even fail to soothe because the cookies suddenly looked like soccer balls?

Commented [5]: Part of the robotic disconnect in the essay is that we hear a lot about talent/skills in soccer but not love of the game. There is no heart in this.

Commented [6]: This phrase, in addition to "for a time" and "but as time went on" earlier in the paragraph, rush the narrative without giving the reader the opportunity to feel the author's struggle. Glossing over time is also characteristic of AI.

Commented [7]: The only people in this essay are shadows of real figures. They don't interact with the author in any substantive way or offer actual feedback. This is an essay focused on themes and lessons but not actual interpersonal connection.

Commented [8]: This is maybe the fourth "life lesson" or "adage" in the essay that repeats the thesis but doesn't offer any memorable storytelling.

Commented [9]: More repetitive summarizing marked by a tricolon (listing in three parts) which is often indicative of AI.



and grow. Second, I discovered that success is not just about raw talent but also about the willingness to work hard, even when the odds seem stacked against you. Lastly, I realized that setbacks are an inevitable part of any journey, but they can be powerful catalysts for personal development if you have the right mindset.

In the years since, this lesson has influenced my approach to both academics and extracurricular activities. When I encounter obstacles—whether it's a difficult project, a challenging course, or a personal setback—I no longer see them as roadblocks but as opportunities to push myself further. I've learned to embrace discomfort, recognizing that growth often happens outside of one's comfort zone. Failure is no longer something to fear but a valuable tool in my ongoing process of self-improvement.

Ultimately, the experience of not making the varsity soccer team was one of the most formative challenges of my life. It taught me that resilience is not built in moments of success, but in moments of failure, when we are forced to find strength within ourselves and keep moving forward. As I look to the future, I carry with me the lessons learned from that setback: that growth is a process, that persistence is key, and that every failure is an opportunity for success in disguise. (709 words)

Commented [10]: Again, here we have a three-part realization (tricolon) that doesn't include any specific application. The "First," "second," and "lastly" are also oddly formal in a personal essay and better suited for a rhetorical argument.

Commented [11]: I'm not sure how this can be "in the years since" given the failed soccer tryout was junior year, and presumably the essay is being written a year later (fall of senior year).

Commented [12]: A stronger, non-AI essay would demonstrate the author's willingness to work hard despite obstacles through specific examples. What was a difficult project? What was the personal setback? The use of "one's comfort zone" is distancing, as opposed to writing "my comfort zone."

Commented [13]: I walk away from the essay not knowing anything compellingly specific about the author's life -- I don't even know what position they played on the field. There is no setting, no people, no sensory description.

