

Introduce:

My name is Sofia Estrada, I use she series pronouns and I graduated Tufts in 1`1`.

I want to read you all something that I wrote 5 years ago when I was applying to colleges. It is based on real life and it helped me discover the power of oxygen.

I hope it may provide some wisdom to you as you go through your years at Tufts. So let me tell you a story, it starts like this.

Zip zip, crunch crunch.

My parents encouraged me to find some inspiration on this, our latest camping trip. So, I brought my favorite pen, a black extra fine Pilot and a yellow legal pad, but so far I had just drawn some cubes on the car ride here. It is the last night and I am laying in my tent. My mind restless. I grab my flashlight, unzip my sleeping bag and tent, and step onto the grass littered with twig from the surrounding trees.

Zip zip, crunch crunch.

I head towards the fire-pit, hoping that the flames and warmth will calm me. Looking down, I see the fire gasping for more wood; I happily oblige, relieved to have a task. As I hunt for fuel, I notice that my senses are overwhelmed by sharp breeze, the orchestra of cricket and cicadetta, and moonbeams glistening through the trees branches.

Hands and pockets full of sticks, I coax the fire back to life with new fuel. It has been eight years since my counselor training but still

it doesn't take long before the warmth reaches my cold cheeks.

Beginners may believe that the more sticks, the better. And if that doesn't spark a flame, add leaves, lots and lots of leaves.

It's actually much simpler. First, you need a variety of sticks: kindle, small twigs, and then medium to large branches and logs. Second, and most importantly, fire needs oxygen. No matter how you arrange the branches, the driest sticks you find, oxygen has to be allowed to enter the fire from underneath.

Allow the oxygen to fuel the fire, along with the sticks.

I place two logs over my neat teepee, satisfied with the resurgence of the fire and pull a camp chair over so my feet hang over the side of the fire pit.

Like a gentle nudge from an old friend, the fire's blaze encourages me.

Today will never happen again, I say to myself grudgingly. So I commit to push all the anxiety and looming commitments aside for a moment.

I came here to remove myself from my sometimes overwhelming world of applications, resumes, family obligations, and the incessant noise of sirens, car doors shutting, and dogs barking in my beloved South City neighborhood.

In order to thrive, to grow (1) I need my family foundation, (2) I need the diversity of life experiences, (3) but most of all I need time and space to let it all my identities and memories flourish.

It's the oxygen, the breath that sneaks in from the side and from underneath the allows the flame to burn brighter, for longer.

Focus on being here, on the grassy lawn at Tufts University, the mosquitos and gnats bumping into my face and arms, the crickets whispering to one another, the rabbits doing the midnight dance, the wisp of the finally cool September air, and the wax from this candle, threatening to burn your fingers.

Notice the flame of your candle, and how the oxygen feeds in.

You arrived to Tufts with 18 or more years of life experience. Let those years be a foundation for you. Already you have your kindling for you fire, the orientation and pre orientation program.

The friends you make here, the classes you love and the classes you hate, the awkward conversations with professors, the clubs you join, let those diversity of experiences be your medium logs that allow your fire to grow taller and in different directions. But I challenge you, not to overlook the space between your foundation and your experiences,

the space where the oxygen sneaks in, because that is the true fuel to a rich, healthy fire.