

# A love letter to psets by Michael C. '16

## Masochists In Training



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*[context for the non-MIT folks out there: a pset, or problem set, is MIT's version of homework. And by "MIT's version", I mean that while a typical pset might only contain 5 problems, every one of those problems is incredibly difficult. And by "incredibly difficult", I mean "incredibly difficult" – by MIT standards]*



Dear psets,

In the past week, you've tried your best to crush my soul. You've made eight hours of sleep an alien concept. You've twisted my mind in ways I didn't know it could twist before. At times, you've driven me up the wall, literally (<https://lh4.googleusercontent.com/-xRJw08b2trc>

[/UFV\\_7rqIUOI/AAAAAAAAJU8/r9IOELStVlw/s600/20120913-Psetting-MC-2.jpg](#)).

And I couldn't be more grateful.

Because in high school, homework was boring. It was something I started at 11pm the night before it was due, and finished at midnight. It was rote memorization, repetitive busywork. I learned Equation A, plugged in values, and spat out an answer.

But not you. With you, a 15-word-long question might turn out to be an hour-long mindbender. An innocent negative sign might take 10 minutes to figure out. I might be using the same equations and formulas that I learned in high school, but by making me apply them in so many different ways – to actually think about problems – you force me to have a much deeper understanding of the material.

Yes, you can be soul-crushing. But you can also be intensely rewarding. There's nothing quite like that intellectual high I get when I've been working 5 hours on a pset and finally understand how a certain equation can be manipulated and combined with another equation in such a way that the entire problem suddenly makes sense. And in those moments, I think I'm finally starting to get a little idea of what being a scientist feels like. You can be rewarding in other ways, too; I've met some of my closest friends here so far through pset parties.

So when my friends at other colleges tell me how easy their homework is – how it really isn't that much different from high school – I don't get jealous. (okay, maybe I get a little jealous when it's 2 in the morning and my pset is due the next day, but whatever). Because I don't want college to be just a natural extension of high school. I want to find my limits, test them, and smash through them. Call me a masochist, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Love,  
Michael.

p.s. I think even my iPhone is getting used to our new relationship. At first, it corrected "psets" to "pests". Then it corrected "psetting" to "partying". I suppose you are a full-time relationship, which is why MIT gives us a ring.

p.p.s. to all the upperclassmen out there: don't worry, I've got plenty of time to get jaded about

this place. Let me frolic in the joys of psetting while I can, eh?

p^3.s. don't worry, despite the psetting I'm still taking full advantage of pass/no record. YOPNRO

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## About Michael C. '16

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Hi! I'm Michael, one of the new(ish) kids on the block. In a nutshell or two: I'm a budding MechE, love building things, and like to pretend I can do a British accent. I'm a writer, a

photographer, a Google ninja, a hipster in denial, a fierce advocate of the Oxford comma. And, of course, a bl...

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