

Editors Column

Real Ingredients, Real Protein: Smoothies Made Easy



Isleen Lee
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This smoothie used a mix of cherries, blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries, along with the other core ingredients mentioned in the article; this smoothie has the perfect sweet flavor. [Source: Author, Isleen Lee]

Have you ever seen fitness influencers share their “ultimate 20-grams of protein” recipe or a satisfyingly thick-textured smoothie that can withstand being held upside down without spilling? Content creators, such

as smoothieflip on Instagram, are known for their vibrant smoothies, close-ups of the smoothie itself, and promotion of protein powder companies. For frequent gym-goers and individuals who are attentive to their protein in-

take, using protein powder is an easy way to achieve daily needs. For others, the seemingly infinite kinds of protein powders can be intimidating, taste bitter, or overpower the original taste of the food it goes into.

I fall in the latter category of protein-power commentators. I wanted something that I could use to easily increase my protein consumption without grilling huge pieces of meat. Unfortunately, a poor first encounter with protein powder led me astray, until now. In hopes of restarting my journey, I looked into the kinds that my local grocery store carried and chose a vanilla-flavored whey protein. As a loyal follower of smoothieflip, I took inspiration from one of his hearty smoothie recipes and created my own. Dubbed the “When you don’t want to use protein powder because it tastes weird but you don’t want it to be watered-down, make this,” this recipe requires: yogurt (bonus if it’s Greek), milk, chia seeds, honey, and frozen fruits. Notice how protein powder wasn’t on my list of ingredients? Keep reading to see why.

My weeks of testing have taught me to be very specific about the ingredients I use, so here are some details that I have found very helpful! Thicker and

higher-protein yogurts are your best option here. I tested my first few smoothies with the protein powder I bought, but once again, I was met with a disappointing metallic and fishy flavor. At first, I thought that it tasted this way because of the unripe frozen mangoes I used, but additional trials without the mango proved that it was the powder at fault. However, I didn’t stop my journey to discover the best protein-powder-free yet protein-full smoothie. After a few weeks of testing with different fruits, sweeteners, milk, and yogurt, I reached the perfect healthy and tasty combination. Below are the outcomes of my hard-fought discoveries!

For the yogurt base, I use the “Strained Thick & Creamy Greek Yogurt Plain” from Trader Joe’s, but I found that other Greek yogurts have worked aptly as well. I found that using regular cow’s milk both tastes and performs the best, in terms of creating a thick smoothie. A sprinkle of chia seeds adds more protein, while a drizzle of honey helps to maintain the sweetness levels. Frozen fruits are key, although what fruits you use are completely up to preference. Add the ingredients in the order listed above, stir after adding the honey, and you’ll have a quick, easy, and healthy smoothie!

Student Reporter

The Art of Recitation: The Poetry Out Loud Competition

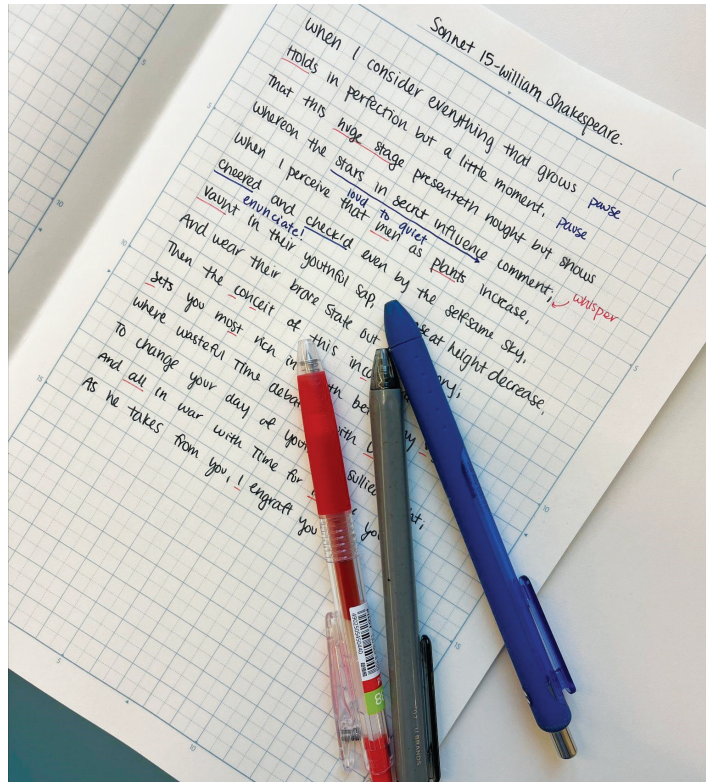


Alexis Choi
Grade 10
The Nueva School

“Ears up, girls, ears up!” were never words I thought I would proudly memorize. This line is from the poem “How to Triumph Like a Girl,” by Ada Limón, 24th Poet Laureate of the United States. I am memorizing and learning how to recite this poem for Poetry Out Loud, a competition for recitation poetry.

Poetry Out Loud runs on regional, state, and national levels. Students in grades nine through twelve pick a few poems, at least one being written before the 20th century, to recite for a panel of judges in competitions all over the United States. In the San Mateo County region, students are assigned coaches who will listen and provide feedback. I’m fortunate to work with Caroline Goodwin, author, and San Mateo County’s first poet laureate. In weekly sessions, I recite the two poems I selected and receive feedback over Zoom.

Initially, I was hesitant to sign up for the competition, because it was something new. However, as I found poems that I resonated with, I realized Poetry Out Loud has allowed me to more deeply understand the art of poetry. Memorization and recitation are special because they allow me to deeply understand the messages behind these pieces. For example,



One technique to memorize a poem is to write it down. Here, I have annotated the poem “Sonnet 15: When I Consider Everything That Grows,” by William Shakespeare. [Source: Author, Alexis Choi]

Ada Limón’s poem is about finding power as a female, a message that I apply to my own life.

Looking for a perfect poem was one of the biggest difficulties when I began. There are 1,311 po-

ems to choose from, from which I selected less than ten at random. After reading a poem in my head, I read it aloud and took note of how it sounded. Did I like the meaning or the literary and rhe-

torical devices? Could I see myself having fun while reciting? After hours of contemplating, I finally settled on “How to Triumph Like a Girl,” and “Sonnet 15,” by William Shakespeare.

Through Poetry Out Loud, I have developed my confidence in public speaking. Reading poetry requires attention to the details such as pronunciation, pauses, and breath. Learning to slow down when I recite poetry lets me focus and makes me feel more self-assured. All of these skills are able to be implemented into the rest of my life, from talking with friends to discussing school topics with my peers in class.

Just like singing in the shower feels cathartic, reciting poetry feels powerful. The rhythm, rhyme, emotion, and life that fills each word makes me feel optimistic and poised. “All the world’s a stage,” William Shakespeare once wrote—and this is how I feel when I read aloud; practicing by myself, with my mentor, and for family. Participating in Poetry Out Loud has given me the skills to understand the meaning of poetry, to speak with confidence, and to find the art in speech. No matter the results of the competition, I am excited to continue my journey with poetry recitation.

Student Reporter

California’s Burning Battle Against the Blazing Fires



Anthony Park
Grade 11
Northwood High School

Recently, a devastating fire struck Los Angeles County only several days after New Year’s Day, on the morning of Jan 7th, 2025. The Pacific Palisades fire, named after the historic Los Angeles neighborhood, started small, just like any other fire, until it was carried by the hot, dry Santa Ana winds. It then spread rapidly throughout the region, eventually leading to the evacuation of over 100,000 people and the entire shutdown of the Los Angeles Unified School District. The area burned by the fire was over 37 miles, equivalent to over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the area of San Francisco! Although this fire occurred on an unusually large scale, unfortunately, wildfires are considered an annual event in California.

The abundance of wildfires in California is not a coincidence: it is greatly dependent on the climate of the west coast. Due to the constant high-pressure system of the Pacific Ocean, Los Angeles experiences less than 40 days of rain a year, concentrated in the winter season. Furthermore, the frequent occurrences of the Santa Ana winds fuel the fires even further. Santa Ana winds predominantly occur from

October to May and are known for the heat and drought they bring. They originate from the high-pressure Great Basin in Nevada and get stronger and hotter as they travel between mountain passes and make their way to Southern California.

Although I was personally not affected by the Palisades Fire, I could empathize with the residents who had to evacuate, as I had to flee from the Silverado Fire in Orange County four years ago. I recall that it was two weeks after I moved to Irvine, and when I woke up in the morning, I could see a burning red sky and towering black smoke from a distance outside my window. We immediately had to leave our houses in panic, and our family spent a day in Los Angeles before the fire near our neighborhood was completely contained. Although, fortunately, the Silverado Fire was smaller than the Palisades Fire, the wildfire had lasting impacts on the environment - I could still visibly see black burnt trees and grass shrubs several years after the fire.

It is also important to acknowledge the unseen work of the firefighters who work day



Residents of Irvine are evacuating from the 2020 Silverado Fire in California. [Source: Author, Anthony Park]

and night to keep our community safe from the dangers of wildfires while risking their lives. Some ways to support these unseen heroes are to visit firefighter memorials or to make donations to local fire stations and foundations.

The many wildfires in Cali-

fornia can cause many problems, but we must continue to battle against them, trying to take preventative measures to keep our homes and families safe, while also not forgetting those who work daily to keep us safe. Stay safe California.

Student Reporter

The Bethel Joint Winter Retreat!



Jayden Eom
Grade 11
Sunset High School



Students participating in games during the Joint Winter Retreat [Source: Author, Jayden Eom]



Students showing off the skits that they made during the Bethel Joint Winter Retreat [Source: Author, Jayden Eom]

Retreats are a staple of many churches, especially exciting for young students. These retreats are typically a three-day and two-night long trip where students partake in multiple events and sermons. The youth group of Bethel Presbyterian Church, also known as City Lights YM (Youth Ministry) holds biannual retreats held during the summer and winter break, typically at a retreat site one to two hours away from the church itself. Their last winter retreat was a bit different, though—the group

had decided to invite three more small churches and hold the retreat at one of the other church locations. This was a very controversial decision, and it at first wasn't taken very well by the students of the church. However, ultimately the pastor ended up going through with the plan regardless.

The Student Board, teachers, and Pastor spent hours trying to prepare for the retreat to make sure that everything would go smoothly, and all these efforts were worth it. The retreat was

a huge success, with many of the students attending having a great time. Many were seen smiling and conversing with each other, even if they had never seen each other before. For example, one student summarized their experience by saying, "I had a great time. I was kind of scared initially but the people were really nice and I really enjoyed the sermons and the activities." This could be seen clearly during the events or break times as even those who were from different churches seemed to be

able to talk and engage with other people that they weren't that familiar with.

Despite this, it was quite evident that the retreat had taken a toll on the people who helped prepare for it. Specifically, the student board members who had spent hours creating promotional videos, and preparing materials and games for the event were worn out. One member said, "Yeah, it was really tough having to prepare everything in the span of a few days with us having our Christmas party, Christmas performance, and having to do this all within like a week. I think I stayed up until like 3 AM for 4 days straight making sure everything was good, but in the end, it was worth it. Seeing everyone having fun and enjoying the games and the experience is what makes it all worth it."

There's no doubt that a ton of planning and preparation goes into these events, not only from the student leaders but also from the teachers and pastor. Despite this, it is clear that these events are for a good cause and are made to be enjoyed by many students.

Student Reporter

Seoulful Sips: How K-Cafes Change LA's Coffee Scene



Sora Ju
Grade 10
Geffen Academy

Recently, a wave of one-of-a-kind cafes has swept the Los Angeles area, bringing a Korean-inspired flair to the city's coffee culture. From the charming minimalist designs and nostalgic desserts at bakery cafes like Harucake to the innovative beverages and Instagram-ready aesthetics of Camel Coffee, these cafes are more than just grab-and-go latte machines—they're cultural hubs of tradition, creativity, and community of Seoul.

One of the most striking features of these cafes is their ability to infuse traditional Korean elements into contemporary menu items. At Harucake in Koreatown, the menu is a celebration of nostalgic Korean flavors, with desserts like mugwort injeolmi cake and sweet potato lattes, evoking memories of traditional childhood snacks every Korean treasure. Meanwhile, the cafe's most popular drink, the "soosoo latte"—a coffee topped with sweet corn cream and named for the Korean word for corn, oksoosoo—has become a viral sensation, drawing long lines of curious patrons eager to taste something new yet familiar.

Beyond the food they offer, these Korean-fusion cafes are designed to offer a full sensory experience. Harucake's pastel



At Harucake in Koreatown, the menu is a celebration of nostalgic Korean flavors: their most popular drink, the "soosoo latte" (pictured left) has become a viral sensation on social media, along with their adorable fresh milk cream cakes (pictured right). [Source: Author, Sora Ju]

yellow walls and adorably decorated cakes create a cozy, whimsical atmosphere. Meanwhile, another Korean-inspired cafe called Camel Coffee, in Los Feliz, exudes a relaxed, rustic vibe

with its vintage furniture and curated knick-knacks. The attention to detail in decor, packaging, and presentation makes these spaces pleasing to the eye, especially social media, which

has played a key role in their popularity.

However, the creativity of Korean cafes does not stop at their design. Their special drink toppings often feature unexpected ingredients and elaborate presentations, such as matcha Einspanners topped with velvety cream or dalgona lattes sweetened with honeycomb toffee. Series A Coffee, another popular spot, experiments with playful yet tasty additions like pink tiramisu cream and black sesame foam. These foam toppings push the boundaries of traditional coffee culture, introducing Los Angeles to entirely new flavor profiles brought from Korean influences across the world. In this way, these cafes can almost make guests feel like they've stepped into Seoul, even for those who have never been there.

As Korean cafes continue to gain popularity, their influence on Los Angeles's coffee scene is undeniable. These cafes are redefining what it means to go out for coffee, whether it's through a perfectly crafted matcha latte or a slice of nostalgic cake, they are creatively connecting Los Angeles to Seoul culture. And with lines out the door every day, it's clear that this Seoulful trend is here to stay.

Student Reporter

Will My 5.0 GPA and 15 APs Be Enough for College?



Claire Kim
Grade 10
Lake Braddock High School

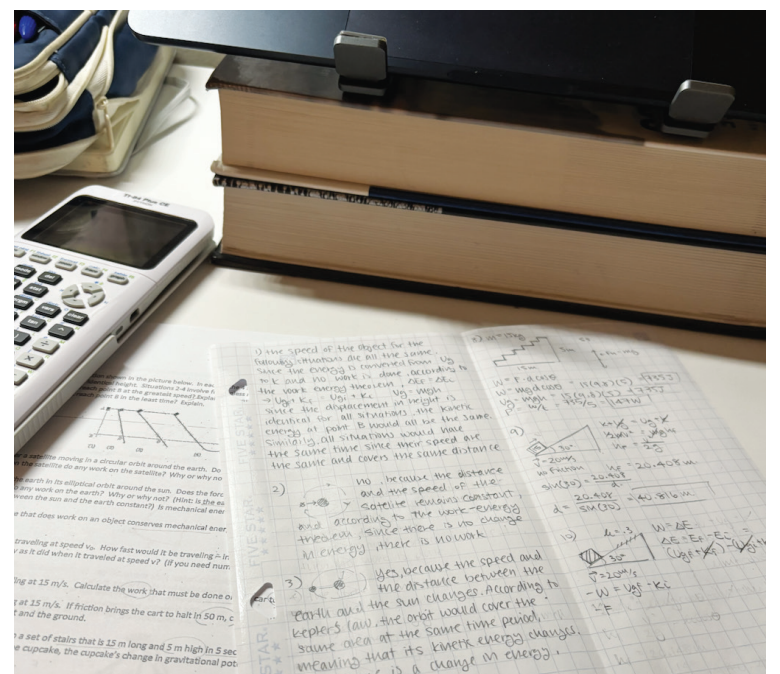
It's mid-year now, and students are tasked with choosing their classes for the next school year. The dreaded junior year approaches and some students decide to add to their load of classes by taking six AP classes. Although this may seem overkill, they know to do this as junior year is the most important for college applications.

From those around me, the average junior course list is composed of something along these lines: AP English Language, AP US History, AP Chemistry, AP Calculus BC, AP Physics 1, and two more electives of their choice. This is not an easy schedule to handle, and even those who manage often find themselves just barely keeping their head above water. Student stress may also come from family pressure, which is a common expectation within overachieving families. However, what is it that specifically drives these students? What motivates them to spend their waking hours studying and sleeping hours anxiously awaiting their next test?

The standards for universities have risen immensely. Selective schools expect students to take 7-12 AP courses throughout their

high school career. Considering that most schools do not allow their freshmen and sophomores to take large numbers of APs, junior year is when those who hope to go to selective schools stack their schedule with rigorous courses. According to Quad Education, Ivy League applicants average somewhere around a 3.9 unweighted GPA. This immense pressure on students reminds them that even a nearly perfect GPA in rigorous classes can only give you a chance at being considered.

Not only that, but students are aware of the fact that this alone is never enough to guarantee a spot at their dream college. The standards for these top institutions seem to increase exponentially each year. The vague college admissions process acts like a double-edged sword, giving some students the chance to shine while others have to insert themselves into an unfamiliar zone. This is due to every student having their strengths, such as music or sports, which gives them an edge in their applications. However, since all students take APs, it serves as a good baseline point for admissions officers to see the amount of rigor they can handle.



Sophia Lee, a junior at Lake Braddock High School works late into the night to finish AP physics homework. [Source: Lee, Sophia]

So as course selections approach, students battle these questions: Can I handle another AP? Will XYZ college accept me if I just take that third science class?

At the end of the day, this decision grazes the line between burnout and the anxiety of not

meeting your standards. There is never a fully "right choice," but just the decision of what feels right to you and achieving balance. The most important takeaway should be that whatever path you choose will have a bright turnout.