



Confidence Backstory

Albert Einstein was born in 1879 at Ulm in Württemberg, Germany. At age five, his father showed him a pocket compass, and Einstein realized that something in "empty" space acted upon the needle; he would later describe the experience as one of the most revelatory of his life. Though he built models and mechanical devices for fun, he was considered a slow learner, possibly due to dyslexia, simple shyness, or the significantly rare and unusual structure of his brain (as seen following his death). He later credited his development of the theory of relativity to this slowness, saying that by pondering space and time later than most children, he was able to apply a more developed intellect.

Einstein began to learn mathematics at about age twelve. There is a recurring rumor that he failed mathematics later in his education, but this is untrue; a change in the way grades were assigned caused confusion years later.

His failure of the liberal arts portion of the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Federal Swiss Polytechnic University, in Zurich) entrance exam the following year was a setback; he was sent by his family to Aarau, Switzerland to finish secondary school, and received his diploma in 1896. In 1900, he earned a teaching diploma at the Swiss Polytechnic University and was accepted as a Swiss citizen in 1901. During this time Einstein discussed his scientific interests with a group of close friends.

Upon graduation, Einstein could not find a teaching post, and instead, started to work at the Swiss Patent office. He judged the worth of inventors' patent applications for devices that required a knowledge of physics to understand. He obtained his doctorate after submitting his thesis "On a new determination of molecular dimensions" in 1905.

That same year, he wrote four articles that provided the foundation of modern physics, without much scientific literature to refer to or many scientific colleagues to discuss the theories with. Most physicists agree that three of those papers (Brownian motion, the photoelectric effect, and special relativity) deserved Nobel prizes. Only the photoelectric effect would win in 1921.

Albert Einstein was much respected for his kind and friendly demeanor rooted in his pacifism. He occasionally had a playful sense of humour, and enjoyed playing the violin and sailing. He was also the stereotypical "absent-minded professor" he was often forgetful of everyday items, such as keys, and would focus so intently on solving physics problems that he would often become oblivious to his surroundings. He died on April 18, 1955 in Princeton, New Jersey.

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