

Portfolio Handbook

Student Guide for Preparing a Portfolio of Prior Learning

ACL 301: Perspective on Prior Learning

Table of Contents

Overview	3
Academic Honesty & Plagiarism	3
Application for Portfolio Assessment	3
Evaluation Process	3
Portfolio Assessment Fees	4
Transcripts and Transfer Credit	4
The Format of the Essay	4
Introduction	4
Body	4
Appropriate Documentation	5
Learning Support & Library Writing Assistance	6
1:1 Tutoring Sessions	7
Drop-Off Essay and Assignment Services	7
Grammarly	7
Guides	7
Appendix A - Essay Topics	8
Appendix B - Completion Checklist	11
Appendix C - Sample Cover Page and Essays	12
Intro Excerpt from Sample Essay	13
Working with Children with Special Needs	18
Intro Excerpt – Sample Essay	18
Death, Dying and Grief	24
Intro Excerpt from Sample Essay	24
Learning Excerpt from within the Body of this Sample Essay	25
Conclusion Excerpt from the Sample Essay	29

Overview

At NLU a student's personal and professional experience and knowledge may be worth college credit via Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and in the ACL301 course, students' learning, derived from academic, personal and professional experiences, is assessed through the development of an electronic portfolio of prior learning. In class, students will complete the following:

- Reflections and activities that will help students understand how their experiences translate to college-level learning and competencies.
- Two experiential essays for potential credit

The completed portfolio submission will first be reviewed by the course instructor and then reviewed by an essay evaluator who will consider the necessary documentation/validation artifacts and the experiential essays developed in ACL 301. Students will be notified of credit recommendations when the essay assessments are completed.

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

As a National Louis University student, you commit to NLU's Policy on Academic Honesty. The [policy](#) can be found in the Student Guidebook and in the NL Catalog.

Application for Portfolio Assessment

Evaluation Process

1. Iterative process based on feedback and reflection

Learning experience essays must be on appropriate topics, eligible for college credit, typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins. Evaluators also check appropriateness of documentation, along with essay format, and length. All learning experiential essays must demonstrate the learning outcomes have been acquired, equivalent to college-level courses. Competencies learned and acquired must be considered proficient in order to receive credit.

2. Finalized portfolio items submitted electronically to D2L

The instructor will review the portfolio requirements for quality and completeness. This review is completely separate from the evaluation of content for credit; however, necessary for the evaluation of earning credit for the ACL 301 itself. If one or more portfolio requirements are not acceptable, the instructor will not assign a passing grade.

Essays and documentation/validation saved in the course assignment dropboxes will be used for evaluation purposes as the evaluators will be added to the course and will be able to access that information. Reviews for the official evaluation process are returned within 2 weeks.

Essays that describe only what the student has done or those that discuss only concepts do not meet the criteria for college credit. In order to receive credit, the says must integrate experiences and concepts. If credit is not awarded, the evaluators explain the additional work requested or the basis for the denial of credit. No revision after the submission of final essays will be accepted.

3. Notification to student of credit recommendations for learning experience essays

Once learning experience essays are reviewed and returned electronically with feedback, any awarded credit is immediately applied to the student's transcript. Students can review essay feedback directly in D2L upon evaluation completion. Students can go into my.nl.edu and check their unofficial transcripts for any awarded credit.

Portfolio Assessment Fees

All students are required to write two experiential learning essays in order to pass the class. Once the final essays have been submitted and class has ended, the essays will be reviewed to faculty content experts for review. These two essays will be evaluated for up to 10QH of additional credit realization at no cost to students.

Transcripts and Transfer Credit

An unofficial transcript (or student copy) NL transcript should be reviewed by students prior to choosing essay topics in order to avoid credit duplication (through the NLU Student Portal). Your Academic Advisor or Success Coach will also make recommendations for essay topics based on your earned credit and the credit needed for graduation in your program. This list will be discussed with you during Week 2 of ACL301 in order for students to make final essay selections. Find the Essay Topic list in [Appendix A](#).

The Format of the Essay

Introduction

Begin with a topic paragraph. The first paragraph should be a guide for the rest of the essay. Use it to introduce the body of the essay. Include a sentence or two about the concrete experience and then summarize the general concepts or learning outcomes to be discussed in the remainder of the essay. For example, a student writing an essay for credit realization in Small Business Ownership might begin the essay like this:

"I have been the owner-manager of the XYZ Tool Company since 1987. As owner-manager I have been responsible for all aspects of running a small business. I have learned a great deal about advertising, supervision of personnel, inventory, pricing, and the legal aspects of business. I have also learned how to assess the local market and to purchase raw materials at reasonable prices."

Body

The body of the essay should discuss each of the outlined general concepts with a focus on demonstrating critical thinking skills, comprehension, and ability to generalize and conceptualize based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. The essay should include specific experiences that relate to the general concepts while emphasizing observations, application, and how knowledge was acquired. Although both general concepts and specific experiences must be included, emphasis should be placed on the general concepts as this will impact the amount of

credit awarded. Throughout the essay, experiences should be used to explain the source of concepts, apply theory or illustrate a principle (e.g., give examples from experience).

To get an idea of the interplay between these factors, consider the following example, which is just part of several paragraphs on advertising principles and procedures:

"I learned in an American Management Association course that the best advertisement is the one which costs the least and has the greatest coverage. However, it pays to be sure that the coverage is the best. For example, one of the newspapers offered a good deal on additional coverage in the entire Northern Area for a small extra charge. I thought this was advantageous until I began getting mail orders from 500 miles away and was spending my profits on postage."

The excerpt provides a clear account of the student's experience and highlights two principles of advertising: manageable territory coverage and using the lowest cost advertising that offers maximum coverage. The essay demonstrates their knowledge of advertising was acquired through work experience and a course taken from the American Management Association. The student also applies these two principles and shares observations from the experience (e.g., excessive profit being spent on postage).

The essay must demonstrate how each general concept is related to one or more specific personal experiences and conversely, how each specific experience reflects a general concept learned.

Conclusion

The conclusion should review the major learning outcomes discussed in the essay. Any global applications or conclusions are also appropriate in this section.

Essays must be 8-10 FULL pages in length, not including the documentation, validation or artifacts. Essays that do not meet the minimum length requirement will NOT be evaluated.

Appropriate Documentation

To meet evaluation requirements, all essays must include supporting documentation or artifacts verifying involvement in learning experiences. This documentation not only verifies specific learning experiences but also helps the college meet accreditation standards by demonstrating the credibility of learning. The documentation should be attached at the end of the essay and may be sent via Word doc. This provided guidelines offer appropriate suggestions for supporting documentation:

1. **Professional Experience:** employment records; awards; letters of commendation; letters of corroboration from supervisors, peers, clients; congratulations on high performance; promotion evaluations; evidence of promotion; evidence of suggestions adopted; samples of work produced; membership in professional or trade organizations; scores on licensing exams; bills of sale; rating forms; and work samples.

NOT acceptable as documentation alone, but useful in clarification: explanation of ranking, rating, or a classification system in a company or organization; performance standards; membership requirements; and job descriptions.

2. **Community Service Activities:** commendations; awards; newspaper and magazine clippings; letters of corroboration from co-volunteers, clients served or supervisors.
3. **Special Accomplishments:** books published; pictures painted; music written or performed; patents obtained; mementos from countries lived in and traveled to; machines designed; speeches given; programs from performances; writing samples; presentations made; proposals written.

Works of art should be submitted via a scanned or electronic photograph or video, if possible. When submitting photographs, please describe them.

4. **Using Letters as Documentation:** letters can be used for verifying many learning outcomes. When students ask someone to write a letter of verification, the person from whom the letter is requested should be given explicit instructions as to what it must contain. Use the following guidelines in requesting letters of verification:
 - a. The individual writing the letter must know the student and have first-hand knowledge of the experiential activity, which the student has cited in the portfolio.
 - b. The author of the letter should clearly state the nature of the relationship with the student.
 - c. The letter should be written on the official letterhead stationery of the company or organization with, which the author is associated.
 - d. The content of the letter should focus on the duties, responsibilities, tasks or activities which were inherent in the experience under consideration. In addition, the letter should tell the context of the experience - who, what, when, where, why, and for how long.
 - e. A special accomplishment resulting in a product requires documentation in the form of one or more letters of verification authored by persons who observed the student while the product was being developed.
 - f. The student should make it clear to the author of the letter that it is one of verification, not recommendation.

Find a helpful ACL301 Completion Checklist in [Appendix B](#).

Learning Support & Library Writing Assistance

As an NL student, you have access to the Learning Support (<https://nl.edu/learning-support/>) resources, which include in-person and virtual assistance, drop-off essay review services, and tutorial guides.

1:1 Tutoring Sessions

Learning Specialists provide tutoring, free of charge, for all NL students including writing (grammar, usage, mechanics, style, organization, and citations). Appointments are normally an hour long and can be schedule one of three ways:

1. Use the [Navigate App](#) to request an appointment (in-person or online via Zoom)
2. Email learn@nl.edu
3. Call (312) 261-3374

Drop-Off Essay and Assignment Services

Students are able to submit their written products via an online form located on the Learning support [website](#). This service provides students with feedback related to key issues, feedback, and resources to support students in mastering college-level writing. Students can expect a response from a Learning Support Specialist within 2 business days.

Grammarly

Grammarly is an online grammar check tool that reviews spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, engagement, and delivery mistakes in English texts and makes suggestions for the identified errors. As a NL student, you get Grammarly Premium free of charge! For more information: <https://nl.edu/learning-support/grammarly-guide/>.

Guides

The University Library (<https://libguides.nl.edu/>) provides comprehensive guides to help students with their writing, APA-style formatting, and research techniques. Student can also look into [American Psychological Association](#) and [Purdue Online Writing \(OWL\)](#) style and grammar guidelines related to APA-style formatting.

Appendix A - Essay Topics

Students will work with their advisor/success coach and instructor to select topics that align with the outlined learning outcomes, in the Topic Outline Packet, and their personal and professional experience. Some topics may need unique documentation and/or details. All essays will require documentation/validation, and a reference page in APA formatting. Certain essay topics have a credit limit, which is specified in the list below.

Acting	ART 495	Fine Arts
Addictions	HSM 495	Elective
Analysis of Religious Beliefs	PHI 495	Humanities
Behavior Disorders	PSY 495	Behavioral Science
Coaching	ELEC 495	Elective
Community Theatre	ELEC 495	Fine Arts
Comparative Religions	PHI 495	Humanities
Coping with Disease, Illness, and Trauma	PSYC 495	Gen Ed Elective
Creative Writing	ENG 495	
Cultural Comparison	SOC 495	Social Science
Death and Dying (students who have taken LAH 325 should not write on this topic.)	PHI 495	Humanities
Drawing or Painting	ART 495	Fine Arts
Economics for Consumers	SOC 495	Social Science
Educational Strategies	CIC 495	Elective
Effective Speaking	ENG 203	Communications
Emergency Disaster Management (<i>Limited credit: 5 QH</i>)	ELEC 495	
Fitness Programs (<i>Limited credit: 3 QH</i>)	ELEC 495	Elective
Gender in Society	SOC 495	Social Science
GLBTQA Studies (<i>Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, and Allies</i>)	SOC 495	Social Science
Health Problems/Disease (<i>limited credit: 3 QH</i>)	ELEC 495	Elective

Human Resources	BUS 495	Elective
Implementing Organizational Change	BUS 495	Gen Ed Elective
Individual Sports (<i>limited credit: 3 QH</i>)	ELEC 495	Elective
Indoor Gardening	SCI 495	Life Science
Instructional Methods • <i>Early Childhood, Primary Level, Teaching Sunday School and other non-formal contexts</i> • <i>Educating, Training Adults, Teaching Seminars, Workshops, and courses in various Context</i>	CIC 495	Elective
Interviewing	ELEC 495	Elective
Leadership	BUS 495	Gen Ed Elective
Marketing	BUS 495	Elective
Marriage and the Family	SOC 495	Social Science
Motivation in the Workplace	ELEC 495	Elective
Nutrition	SCI 495	Life Science
Online Social Networking Outline (<i>limited credit: 3 QH; students in the BA Communication program cannot write on this topic</i>)	COMP 495	Gen Ed Elective
Organic Gardening	SCI 495	Life Science
Parenting (<i>students who write on Parenting cannot write on Working or Single Parenting</i>)	PSYC 495	Gen Ed Elective
Personal Counseling/Therapy	ELEC 495	Gen Ed Elective
Photography	ART 495	Art Special Topics
Professional Publications	COM 495	Gen Ed Elective
Program Development	ELEC 495	Elective
Project Management	BUS 495	Gen Ed Elective
Quality Improvement	BUS 495	Gen Ed Elective
Race and Racism	SOC 495	Social Science
Sales	BUS 495	Elective

(students who write on Sales may not write on Marketing)

Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem	PSY 495	Gen Ed Elective
Small Business Ownership	BUS 495	Elective
Social Justice	ELEC 495	
Social Service Agencies	HSM 495	Elective
Stress Management	ELEC 495	Elective
Team Sports <i>(Limited credit: 3 QH)</i>	ELEC 495	Elective
Time Management <i>(Limited credit: 3 QH)</i>	ELEC 495	Elective
Understanding the New Testament/Christian Scripture	PHI 495	Humanities
Understanding the Old Testament/Hebrew Scripture	PHI 495	Humanities
Volunteerism	ELEC 495	Elective
Working Parents <i>(only one essay on Parenting allowed; single parent, working parent or parenting)</i>	PSY 495	Gen Ed Elective
Working with Special Needs Children and Adults <i>(School Aide or Agency/Social Services Paraprofessional Experience; students who have taken HSM 305 should not write on this topic).</i>	ELEC 495	Elective

Appendix B - Completion Checklist

As an aid to completion of the portfolio requirements, use the following checklist for your essays. **Experiential essays MUST include the following:**

- ☐ What did you do? [Concrete Experience]
- ☐ What did you notice? [Observations and Reflections]
- ☐ What did you conclude as a result of what happened? [Abstract Conceptualization]
- ☐ How did you apply your learning to future situations? [Active Experimentation]

In addition be sure that you have,

- ☐ Completed the plagiarism activities within ACL 301 successfully
- ☐ Completed the final copy of both essays
- ☐ Provided appropriate documentation, scanned and attached to the corresponding essays to support each topic

Appendix C - Sample Cover Page and Essays

Volunteerism (title)

Full Name

Credit for Prior Learning, National Louis University

ACL 301: Perspectives on Prior Learning

Instructor's Name

Date

Intro Excerpt from Sample Essay

I have been a volunteer for the past fifteen years. I have volunteered in the Head Start program for eight years, Parent Teacher Association for eight years, Girl Scouts for seven years and Boy Scouts for four years. I have also served on the Board of Directors for a neighborhood organization for two years. I have found that volunteering provides leadership and organizational skills, prestige, and special preference to benefits and programs. My experience as a volunteer for the past fifteen years has benefited both me and my family through the contribution. I have been able to contribute to the community in which we live.

I have developed leadership and organizational skills through community work which have helped me in my professional life. As president of the parent body at Head Start, I have learned to plan for meetings and to be knowledgeable about topics being discussed at the meetings. For example, shortly after I was elected and accepted the position of president for the first time in this organization, I was told I was expected to chair the first parent meeting. After inquiring as to what duties this consisted of, I was told of the topics that would appear on the agenda and that I was required only to name what was on the agenda. Also, I was told I would learn the format of the meetings as we went along.

During the meeting, after I read each item of business on the agenda, there was a discussion on each item. I realized I was not fully prepared as questions came up and were directed to me. I then realized that I was expected to know answers to these questions or some part of them. From that point on, I insisted that a brief meeting between the coordinator of the program and I be held with the coordinator informing, updating and explaining to me items on the agenda. I learned to be informed by taking notes and compiling information on each agenda item before the meeting. I then began to use this approach in my professional life, and I could see the difference this approach made in department and informational meetings. I have found that it

has made me feel more informed on issues and in a better position to respond. After one meeting I was told by my boss, "Nice job, I could tell you have done your homework."

Volunteering has given me the opportunity to obtain skills such as planning events, delegating and working with groups. In working with the Head Start program, I became familiar with leadership skills as I became more experienced in the program. I learned to acknowledge a job well done whenever possible and to delegate when possible. For example, after holding several lower positions in the Head Start program, I noticed there were some presidents of the parent body that seldom acknowledged a job well done by parents. I made a priority of recognizing special efforts by the parent volunteers because people need to know that their efforts are appreciated.

I have also become aware of the relationships that presidents built with other parents. I became very friendly with some presidents and very distant with others. I noticed I became very involved and was asked to help out when I became friendly with the president, and I was not as involved or seldom was asked to help out when I was not familiar with the president. I learned to use past presidents' leadership styles to motivate parents. I applied a few leadership styles such as acknowledgment of a job well done, building relationships by getting to know other parents, and delegating and showing involvement myself as much as possible. Gradually, I noticed a great respect for me by many parents. I also noticed the willingness to help out by other parents and found this made delegation easier.

I also began to recognize who was best qualified for a job and who was not, or who would not stick with the job until finished. I learned not to discourage parents from participation when they would not stick with a job. For example, I found one parent always volunteered to be on a committee or to be in charge of a project, but she never was around to complete the project. I always had to complete the project myself at the last minute or find someone else to complete it. When a very important project came up at a parent meeting and she volunteered for it, I

hesitated. The Director of the program knew why I hesitated and immediately stepped in and gave her approval for the parent to assume the responsibility. I could not understand why she did this until she then asked for one other person to work with the parent. Another parent volunteered to help with the project. After the meeting the Director explained to me that it is better not to discourage parents' participation because the program is supposed to be run by parents. She also explained to me that in cases of a job that required only one person, she would often assign two people to ensure that the job would get done.

From this experience I learned to find a supplement for weaknesses and saw that it worked. I used this technique at work in a case where I had to delegate an important project. I had always overlooked one secretary when delegating because of her inability to complete a project before the expected due date. After discovering the technique of supplementing for weaknesses, I found if I divided the project in parts and delegated a small portion to her, she met her deadline. Each time she met her deadline, I praised her. Once when I had no one else to whom I could delegate half of a project, I had to depend on her to complete the whole project. She completed the project, and on time.

I have found that volunteering has aided me to become more aware of community and school issues that may or may not affect my family. There are many issues presented to the Parent Teacher Association. These include asking for their support for the selection of school board members, bills that are voted on that may affect the educational system, tax related bills, and community issues. For example, the rezoning and demolition of many family dwellings for the building of a research center in Evanston was presented to the Parent Teacher Association. Many of the families had lived in some of those buildings all their lives, and others lived there because they could not afford any place else. Another factor in this case was that the City of Evanston did not offer the appraised value for these homes. Then there was the matter of the type of research that would be conducted. Issues such as the type of chemicals the center would be using and the disposal of waste were presented. There was the probability of nuclear

materials being tested. The issue was presented to the Parent Teacher Association in an effort to get its support and to build strength in uniting together against the building of this center in Evanston. Had I not been involved in the Parent Teacher Association; I would not have been as familiar with the issue. I have learned that volunteering with certain organizations keeps one informed on issues.

In working with the Girl Scouts, I have learned to work with the children to create and maintain a positive atmosphere for growth, adventure and fun. In teaching the Girl Scouts' promise, law, motto and slogan and explaining what each means, I have developed a concern and awareness for the well-being of my community and society. For example, after the completion of learning the Girl Scout law, the assignment for everyone for the next week was to list any Girl Scout laws that we could identify that were or were not abided by. We came up with numerous things: Turning off the light switches after one uses them was referred to as "the law to use resources wisely." Not littering was referred to as "the law to protect and improve the world around me." And helping someone to feel better or to be happy was referred to as "the law to be cheerful." Many others were also discussed. I learned that if I lived by the motto, slogan, and laws, I could contribute to my community and society and improve my values and my own well-being.

At weekly meetings we set aside time for girls to share their concerns, ideas, and any feelings without fear. No matter how bizarre an idea may have been, I learned from The Girl Scout Leaders Manual never to discourage an idea. By not discouraging ideas, we built a relationship with the girls in which they could express themselves without fear or rejection. I remember one girl suggested that our Brownie Troop go to Disney World in Florida. Even though I felt we would not be able to earn enough money to do this that year and there was a very good chance our troop would not be together next year because of the age range of the girls, I appeared very enthusiastic about the idea while explaining to the girls that it would take a long time for us to save that amount of money.

I learned to be creative and to encourage and support self-help. For example, during a meeting of the Boy Scouts while the boys worked on a project, I noticed one child having difficulties with his project. As I helped him, several other children requested my assistance. After attempting to help with each child's project, I realized that more and more children requested my assistance. I found myself completing the project that was intended for the boys to complete. I also realized that it was not a matter of their needing assistance, but rather their request for my attention. At the next meeting we continued to work on the project, but whenever a child asked for my help, I called for all the boys' attention and demonstrated on a sample project that I had made for myself. Periodically, I praised the good work of each child, letting them know they were doing a good job. I learned that when I gave good instructions with examples when help was needed, it not only taught the individual a new skill, but it relieved me of actually doing the job myself. I found this to be a valuable tool in working with the Boy Scouts and on a job in a supervisory role. For instance, I found when an employee does not understand a job I gave simple illustrations on a sample, explaining the work as I went along. Then I asked the employee to complete one with me, explaining what he was doing as he went along to reinforce the procedure I had just explained to him. I have found that this has given me more time to work on projects that require my attention.

By following the Girl Scout and Boy Scout mottos and slogans and living by their laws, I have learned how to improve myself as a human being. I have become aware of community issues, school issues and how to plan programs through working with the Parent Teacher Association and Evanston Neighbors at Work. I have learned organizational and leadership skills in working with the Head Start program. All of these experiences have been helpful in making me a better human being.

Documentation for this essay included: A PTA membership card, a letter from the administrative director of the neighborhood organization, a certificate of accomplishment and certificate of training from the YMCA, and two certificates of accomplishment from the Head Start program.

Working with Children with Special Needs

Intro Excerpt – Sample Essay

Working with Special Needs children can be equally as rewarding as it is challenging. Special needs that are namely on the Autism Spectrum can be especially hard to define as these types of individuals can fall into a gray area because of how high-functioning they can be (Wood, et al., 2018). Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), which also includes Asperger's syndrome (AS) are defined "by the presence of a "triad" of impairments: 1) social deficits, 2) repetitive/stereotypical behaviors and interests and 3) communication difficulties." My introduction to working with special needs children was during the 3 years I spent working as a nanny for the Gibbons family. The Gibbons family was a family of four- Mom and Dad, and a son and daughter, Joey & Grace respectively. Both parents were extremely successful, driven individuals, who had flourishing personal businesses and held high-level positions in large international companies.

At the beginning of my tenure as their caregiver Joey was 4 years old and Grace was 1. I would begin my day at the Gibbons home at 6:45am before the kids awoke, and my day would finish between 5pm and 9pm every night. When I first began with this family, I had no background working with special needs children and had never been exposed to the behavior of kids on the Autism spectrum. As Joey was four it was time to start introducing him to the world of organized education. He was in pre-school and was not having an easy time of it. I began watching him about halfway through his first year of school. His condition was detected when he rebelled against anything that was structured, such as waiting in line and speaking in turn. Joey was also unable to form relationships with other students that were not combative and the idea of sharing a toy or crayon drove him to a fit. For some time, his behavior was brushed aside as he was simply adjusting to school life and that he might possibly have a behavioral issue. I quickly learned from Joey's parents that the school decided it was time for Joey to get some special

testing to see if he might have needs that deviate from the norm of typical four- and five-year-olds. One morning I was playing with Joey at the kitchen table with play-doh. We were sitting next to each other and talking about the cars that we were building out of the soft dough. He would go on and on telling me elaborate stories about the cars, his imagination being more vivid than anything I could dream up. I looked at him and said to him, "Joey, where did you learn so much about cars that makes you love them?" He continued to play and talk and play and talk, and I kept looking at him next to me, waiting for him to answer me. Again, I asked "Joey? Can you hear me, I asked you a question?" It was bothering me that he was not responding to me, and I moved my face closer to him to see if he would turn to me. Eventually, in a monotone voice, Joey said, "I like talking about cars and I love the Cars movie" and then he quickly moved on to the next car story. The situation was an awkward one for me, as that was the moment that I realized that he was refusing to look at me in my eyes when I spoke with him. I later learned that one of the most telltale signs of an individual on the spectrum would avoid eye contact. (Wood, et al. 2018)

Joey's parents finally took him to his pediatrician and then to a specialist to see about getting a diagnosis of his condition. At that time, he was too young to be given a full-on diagnosis of ASDs or AS. Initially he was given the diagnosis of autistic-like tendencies and all we could do was work with him to try and correct his behavioral problems. I continued to do the best that I could, bringing him to school every day and trying to report my observations back to his parents. At first his parents seemed dismayed that their child had a problem. They were often gone and at work while I was at home trying to manage their son's behavioral issues and take care of a 1yr little girl who was often lost in the shuffle. I wrote in a journal daily listing big milestones, meals, naps and things of that nature, as well as issues that would pop up with Joey. One experience that really opened my eyes to the nature of the problem was putting Joey on the bus to his special school. I would wait outside with him until the bus came and would have to go on the bus and strap him in the seat so that he could not get up and move. I said to him, "Joey,

come on let's go, the bus is here," and he began kicking and screaming "I want to play on my computer today, I'm not going to school!" As we walked towards the bus, I was practically carrying him at this point while he struggled and tried to hit me. Once we got on the bus he proceeded to slap and punch every kid we walked past. I learned that day that not only did Joey have a problem that we needed to deal with, but that his parents were in denial about the situation. I realized that loving your child so much could often not let you see the truth sometimes.

The mental and emotional effects that Joey's downward-spiraling behavior had on his family were highly emotional. His parents vacillated between feeling like they had failed as parents and pretending like it was no big deal, just another obstacle to overcome. I realized that Joey's parents might not always see what is real when it comes to evaluating their son's diagnosis, but it did not mean that they did not love and care for him. Joey's sister Grace seemed to suffer the brunt of the effects of Joey's hardships. I made it a goal to always include her, make her also feel special and to spend my time equally between the two children. Once I walked in on a scene with Joey and his mother arguing over whether or not he was going to eat dinner. Grace was eating peacefully in her chair and she was learning how to feed herself with utensils. I looked her full in the face and said "Grace, you're doing such a great job eating your supper today" and smiled at her. She instantly was beaming and I realized how much a child needs to hear encouraging words to continue to grow in a healthy way. The effects that Joey's AS had on me were often overwhelming at times. I would call my mom often to vent about how I felt like I was battling Joey's syndrome on my own, and that I felt like stand-in parents, as they were too busy to take care of him. I felt alone and I felt unprepared to care for a special needs child. Mentally and emotionally, I was exhausted from spending 10-14 hrs a day curtailing a child who was unable to correct or control his own behavior.

When Joey's parents finally came to the realization that he needed extra help; they were very composed and practical. I realized that oftentimes-difficult things in life could take us

unprepared. In my experience, once we can wrap our minds around the problem, we can often face the problem better than we did initially. Getting help was their first step. They enlisted the aides at school to communicate with me daily when picking Joey up from school. They helped me better understand certain tactics such as remaining calm when Joey got upset even if it was really hard, and how to use time out as the best form of discipline. Stopping an AS child from playing with their beloved 'hobbies' can be more devastating to them than taking anything away, or even refusing to discuss the hobby can be quite effective in behavioral training (Wood, et al., 2018). We also learned that trying to see the world through Joey's eyes could be quite helpful to predict times when a meltdown could occur. We regularly went to the playground to get socialization and for both the children to enjoy normal healthy social interactions and exercise. Once a situation arose when we're swinging on the swing: a boy asked if he could push Joey on the swing and then if Joey would push him when he was done. I immediately knew that due to Joey's AS, this was not going to work out well. Joey's immediate response was to say yes and I knew he would take advantage of the free pushes, and that once it was his turn, he would not be willing to do his part. I quickly jogged over and told Joey and the boy that in order for this to work he was going to have to do the pushing first, and then it could be his turn second. After some initial protest my experiment worked, I felt victorious that day, and Joey learned a valuable lesson. I learned that day that being thoughtful about what could potentially go wrong could help us avoid what can sometimes be extreme behavioral problems while also still giving both children the opportunity to be a part of typical childhood experiences.

AS is a triad of socialization problems, repetitive behaviors and fascinations, and difficulties communicating. Often kids with AS are so high functioning that they often are not considered eligible for disability services although they definitely need extra help that is given to those in special education (Wood, et al., 2018, pg.25). Wood, et al., (2018) state that "individuals with AS may have conventional vocabularies but they typically have problems with social communication, particularly conversation, non-verbal cues and reciprocal interaction" (pg. 27).

Joey's inability to "put himself in other people's shoes" made it very difficult for him to cultivate the feelings of empathy that most children learn from a young age. He could not understand that it was impossible for his thoughts to be shared by his peers and his family and it often made life very frustrating for him. Those with AS will often choose to talk more with you than with you and that makes many one-way conversations (Wood, et al., 2018, pg.20). I would routinely sit in the basement with Joey while he played with Hot Wheels, which was one of his "obsessions." One time while we were downstairs playing I began to interact with Joey so that I could also be a part of the fun as most other children I had interacted with usually enjoyed having someone role-play or interact with them. Joey angrily swiped the car from my hand, and without missing a beat continued on telling a very lengthy and loud story about the day that the "car world" was having. I understood that day that Joey really was suffering from a handicap and that in order to interact with him I was going to have to choose a different time to bond with him.

Understanding the problem that we were dealing with was not only a relief to those who cared for Joey on a day-to-day basis, but it was a relief to him too. Eventually most children can finally reach a stage where they are old enough to understand their handicap, and this understanding can give them the tools they need to make sense of why they act the way they do (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2017, pg. 4). I would take Joey to therapy in the beginning only once a week; by the end of my tenure there I was taking him 3-4 days a week and he was getting ready to attend a school designed to help those on the autism spectrum. Whenever I would find out something new or an interesting approach to Joey's AS, I would share this information with his parents and teachers and vice versa. I really understood how involved a caregiver has to be in the life of a child when difficulties were a part of their life.

McLaughlin & Rafferty (2017) say "A desire to be treated like the rest of their peers, perhaps as a way to minimize the perceived impact of 'it' on their lives" (pg. 199). In the enlightening age of Joey's disorder, I was challenged to utilize this tool with Joey and his social skills. We were taking a walk through the neighborhood and a group of kids was playing. He immediately ran

over to join them without even asking and I called back to him, “Joey, come back here and ask for permission first!” He refused to come back so I marched over, frustrated from a long day and said “Joey, ask the other boys here if they are allowed to run off from their moms or nannies without permission?” When he asked the other boys, they all said they had to ask their parents first before they left the company of their parents. He looked at me, and even though he was angry and begrudging, I could tell he enjoyed having to do the same routine as the other boys; he finally felt like one of them. I learned that day that sometimes the best way to work with Joey was to let him discover for himself what made it really worth it to obey.

During my time as a nanny, I delved into research and was daily looking at new ways to be a part of this family’s growing pains and joys. There are countless blogs written by parents of AS kids. I discovered even more articles about autism and a growing number of books that are helpful to those experiencing AS. The autism spectrum has been around for some time and has been studied, but AS is a newer form of autism. As a result of how high functioning the individual can be it is regularly a disorder that goes unnoticed. As one mommy-blogger said, “When he turned two, he could not speak, socialize, or engage like other kids. It was as if someone just turned the light inside of him OFF. He preferred trains, planes, cars and everything with transportation. His toys became an obsession and interaction with people became almost nonexistent. We thought he was shy. We thought he would grow out of it, but he did not.” (Aspergermom, 2019, line 9) Doing this type of research and reading about other’s experiences with AS not only helped me understand what Joey’s disorder was all about, but I also learned other ways of coping through the awareness of others dealing with AS.

Documentation: Employment verification letter; workshops attended, trainings

Death, Dying and Grief

Intro Excerpt from Sample Essay

In my lifetime, I have experienced the death of many extended family members: all of my grandparents, a still-born nephew, many uncles, and many aunts. However, the most profound deaths were those of my mother and my father. Their deaths were the ones to affect my entire life from that moment forward. This essay is the story of how they died, and the learning outcomes I have applied by the experience. I never considered death a course of learning before, but upon reflection, realized it was the most poignant course of my life. The lessons started with the death of my mother.

My mother and I were a lot alike. We were not close like best-friends, but Mom was always there when I needed her. She and I shared creative similarities, loving the art of quilting and sewing together. My mother was the biggest influence on me growing up. She was the person I have always tried to become – strong, smart, classy, and a loving mother. Her death came at the time in my life when I was drawing even closer to her. I was eight weeks away from having my first child, an event we had all waited eleven years for. Mom and I were so excited about the new baby coming, and had made plans for her to fly out and stay with us in Texas immediately after the baby was born. I went home for lunch one day, and there was a message on the answering machine to call my brother. I could hear the strain in his voice on the message, and he said it was regarding Mom. I called him back and he struggled to say the words, “Mom died last night.” I heard my own voice scream “No! Not Mom!” as if anyone else’s death would have been better. My legs collapsed beneath me, and I sat on the floor, rocking my unborn baby hearing the details of her death. It happened quietly, peacefully, and eternally. Mom had died in her sleep of heart failure. We buried her four days later on her sixty-ninth birthday.

Dad’s death came five years later, but under very different circumstances. Mom and Dad had just celebrated 50 years of marriage together prior to Mom’s passing. Needless to say, Dad did

not recover well from her death. I truly believe he died inside that night, because it was at that moment that he seemingly stopped caring about anyone or anything that he was close to. He simply shut down. He drank himself numb every day. He stopped paying bills, and the bank foreclosed on the house. He moved into a small trailer on a piece of property in the middle of the desert, without a phone or physical address. He stopped communicating with all of us children and the few friends that he had. He refused help, and we were shut out of his life.

On New Year's Day in 20XX, I received a call from my brother that Dad had inoperable pancreatic cancer and was given less than a month to live. That phone call was an entirely different emotional experience than when I found out about Mom's passing. I only had the chance to speak to Dad once during a moment of lucidity over the next couple weeks. Dad said he loved me, he asked about the girls, and we had a peaceful, final conversation. I accepted the fact that he was ready to die, and welcomed it.

That call was my closure with Dad. Upon reflection of those losses, and the many lessons I have learned from the experiences, I have discovered the psychological concepts of grieving as experienced in the five stages first introduced by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) in her book, *On Death and Dying*.

Learning Excerpt from within the Body of this Sample Essay

Kubler-Ross (1969) walks us through the five stages a terminally ill patient experiences in facing death, which are then compared as similar for the grieving process. These five stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In reflecting back, the denial stage was different for me between Mom's and Dad's deaths. I have learned this is because of the events preceding each death. When Mom died, it was a time when I was growing close to her. I was about to become a Mom myself, and needed my Mom in a way I had not needed her before. Her death was sudden and unexpected. She was gone. I had no time for closure with her. No good-byes. No final words. No hug or touch. Nothing. She was gone. When Dad died, I had

already lost him emotionally and mentally. He had already died in my life, and there was a very short denial process in my grieving. In fact, knowing his suffering would soon end, I welcomed his death.

My experience with the second stage, anger, was different between the two deaths as well. In reflecting back on those emotions, I realize that the anger was just as intense with each death, but was directed at a different object. With Mom's death, I was mostly angry with God. I could not understand why He could not have let Mom be around a few years more in order to let me know her grandchildren. I have learned to accept that this is one of those areas about God that I will never understand. My anger with Dad, however, was directed at him. I was angry for all that he had done since Mom's death, and was hurt by being shut out. I was grateful that God took him quickly, only suffering for two weeks.

From reflecting on this experience however, I realize that Dad had actually been suffering for five long years. His behavior was grief unbridled. His personality would not allow anyone to help him with that grieving process, and it took over his life. He may have actually been suffering with this cancer for many years, and we never knew it. We only had to suffer with the knowledge for two weeks, once a doctor was finally involved. This reflection has actually helped me deal with my anger towards Dad. I realize now the intense suffering he went through, alone.

The next stage of grieving in Kubler-Ross's book is bargaining (Kubler-Ross, 1969). This stage, even after a lot of reflection, really did not occur for me in my experiences. In her book, Kubler-Ross (1969) describes this more for the dying process, than being able to apply it towards grieving someone already dead. It is the process of offering something in exchange for the affliction. She writes, "If we have been unable to face the sad facts in the first period and have been angry at people and God in the second phase, maybe we can succeed in entering into some sort of an agreement which may postpone the inevitable happening..." (p. 93). I do not recall any bargaining in my own experience. For me, the only opportunity to bargain with

God or life would have been during my Dad's illness. However, for his sake, I welcome death sooner rather than later. He was ready to go.

The fourth stage I definitely experienced, and that is depression. Again, my experiences were different between the two deaths. After Mom died, I found myself unwilling to really break down until after the funeral was over. During the time preceding, I was busy being strong for my Dad, and other family members. I was also busy taking care of business around the house, going through her belongings and things. In learning the grieving process, I realize that was also my denial phase. I was denying to myself that Mom was really gone. After the funeral was over, it hit me hard. I cried and slept for several days. It did not help that I was entering my eighth month of pregnancy, and emotions and weariness were already upon me. I find that I still have times of depression over Mom's death. I miss her so much and will be hit with sadness now and then. I am learning to deal with depression though. It comes in waves, and I have learned from Dad's example that it is not healthy to keep it inside. I will cry at the moment, even if it means spending a little time in the bathroom at work. I let the moment come, allow myself to be sad, and then get through it and move forward. I talk about it to others, and keep the depression in balance. It is interesting how I do not get those waves of depression about Dad. He comes to mind, but I do not have the depressive moments attached to his death. In reflection, I believe this is for two reasons. One is that I was never emotionally close to my Dad, so, there is less of a bond that was broken when he died. Second, at the time of his death I welcomed it. It was better that he dies, to stop his suffering. When I think of my Dad, it is with more acceptance than when I think of Mom. Kubler-Ross (1969) writes, "When anger, resentment and guilt can be worked through, the family will then go through a phase of preparatory grief, just as the dying person does. The more this grief can be expressed before death, the less unbearable it becomes afterward." (p.176). I have learned this is exactly what I went through with my Dad, and did not have the opportunity to go through with my Mom.

This brings me to the fifth stage, acceptance. According to Kubler-Ross (1969), this phase should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is the stage when a dying patient has come to terms with his or her “fate”, having worked through the previous four stages (pg. 22). Translating that to my experiences with the deaths of my parents, my acceptance phase was much more successful with my Dad than my Mom. As previously expressed, I feel this is due to welcoming my Dad’s death as a relief to his suffering, whereas with Mom, she was taken away without any time to let her go. I have learned to accept her death as time goes on, however. It has made it easier knowing she is in a better place, according to my religious belief. It also makes it easier by carrying on her love to my children. I keep pictures of my parents out, so the children know who their grandparents were. I also teach them things that my Mom taught me, such as quilting. My girls are still young, but they have their grandmother’s gift of creativity. I use these opportunities to keep my parents’ memory alive to my children, which has helped me to move on with accepting their deaths.

With time, the emotions are dealt with easier, and with less force than at first. Immediately after their deaths, my emotions were raw and uncontrolled. I remember the first time my emotions burst out at work, right after Mom died. I locked myself in my office, and cried. It had hit me suddenly, and I could not stop the tears. My husband worked close by, and came to see me and hold me. I learned that this was important to me, not crying alone. I applied that to when my Dad died. The raw emotions immediately after his death would come strong and unexpectedly as well. I was better prepared though, and would reach out to someone I was close to in order to support my grief. The emotions lessen as time goes by. During the later months and years, I seem to feel the sadness coming on, instead of being broadsided by it. I have a smoother wave in processing it. I realize the emotional pain of losing someone will never cease. I know now it is something about my life that I have to work through each time. It is no longer a strange feeling, but a natural one that I accept as part of my life experience.

Besides the grieving process, dealing with death has taught me many additional things. From experiencing each grieving stage, I am better prepared for the sting that will be experienced as more of my loved ones inevitably pass on during my lifetime. I also bring an understanding to those around me who will experience grieving from the death of someone close. For example, I have already had the opportunity to be there when a coworker's father passed away. She and I had many discussions together, through many tears, sharing our experiences and feelings. It helped her, I believe, to have someone to talk to who could identify with her loss. I know how talking helps me to process my emotions, and applied that to her experience. Another learning I applied was the pain I experienced by my Dad's dying in financial ruin. I have created a will, expressing exactly my desires for where everything should go upon my death. I have also set up a financial plan to have my house paid for as soon as possible. I learned how important it is to not be indebted to creditors, especially after your passing. My Dad would have been able to keep the house in the family, had he owned it straight out. My Mom and Dad had no will, no savings, and only their pension and social security when they died.

Conclusion Excerpt from the Sample Essay

For me, the experience of death and dying has affected my past, present, and future. It helped me to define what means most to me. I now apply that understanding to my decisions today, and to developing my future. I want to be able to face my own death with the peace of knowing I did the best with the days and relationships God gave me. I also want my children to face my death with as little unnecessary difficulty as possible, which is why I have put together the documentation and accounts to assist them during that process. Finally, I am able to help others through my experience. One example is my friend at work who lost her father. I will not hesitate to be there for others, knowing firsthand the pain of their loss. Having now also learned the stages of grieving, I will be able to add the understanding of the grieving process, along with my own personal experiences to share. If my loss can be someone else's gain, it helps me to be a better person too. Documentation for this Sample Essay included: Bibliography and death certificates