

At the Downtown Boxing Gym, I didn't just teach Detroit's underprivileged youth how to uppercut. Several Detroit public high schools require students to take a placement test, which was just a few months away. None of the eighth graders knew what they'd be tested on, so I suggested to the other coaches that we create a weekly study schedule. We planned for lessons, tasks, and practice tests. Because the students also needed to write personal essays, I decided to conduct weekly writing workshops and delegated the test-prep sessions to the other coaches.

I prepared a starter kit with the Detroit Public School District's essay requirements and grading scale. I also wrote a list of writing tips. On the first day of my workshop, my students fumbled through the pages with wide eyes and raised eyebrows. Amongst the murmurs, I heard one student say, "What makes him think we [sic] getting into these schools anyways?" I set the packets aside and talked with them instead. I explained that the essay isn't an obstacle, but an opportunity to show the schools just how much they had to offer. I saw a few nods of understanding. As I began to answer their questions, I noticed a few students highlighting information in their starter packs.

I introduced the idea of essay outlines and worked with each student to create one. The prompt asked students to describe qualities that make them stand out. I asked the students how they would respond. Multiple students said they didn't know. To help them see the potential in themselves that they couldn't yet recognize, I created individual Standout Sessions.

My first Standout Session was with a soft-spoken student who usually kept to herself. I asked her what topics interest her. She wasn't sure. I dug deeper. I noticed that she always seemed to be doodling, so I shifted the focus away from the essay and asked her about her most recent drawings. We looked at the flowers and strawberries she'd drawn. I asked her why she chose these subjects. She told me about summer weekends spent planting and nurturing fruits

and vegetables in her grandmother's garden. I pointed out that gardening requires patience, attention to detail, and organization. I told her that these are all standout characteristics. "Hey, I guess I'm pretty good at that," she said.

We connected these qualities to the essay prompt and outlined the remainder of the essay. I helped her identify how patience could help her understand difficult algebra equations. We also made the connection that being detail-oriented would help her spot specific character development in a literary text. Finally, we linked her organizational skills from gardening to effectively managing coursework and meeting deadlines. She reviewed the completed outline and smiled. Setting it beside her laptop, she immediately drafted the first sentence of her essay. I told her to call me if she needed help, but she didn't respond. She just kept typing.

After I finished the Standout Sessions with all 15 eighth graders, they each had essays that highlighted their potential as incoming freshmen. We were ready to submit their applications. In the following months, I found out that each of them received admission into their school of choice.

Mentoring my students through this process contributed to my pursuit of a legal education. I'm eager to guide my future clients with the same dedication and care.