



Experiential Learning Essay Template

Review this check list in prior to submitting your experiential learning essay. If you have completed all of the items listed below, you are ready to submit your essay. Keep in mind, your evaluator may still request additional material, however, the list below will guide in your essay submission preparations. Not adhering to these guidelines will cause a delay in processing.

**** Review each of the items below and check if you have completed each of them:**

1. I have selected an approved essay topic from the essay course descriptions page.
http://www.phoenix.edu/admissions/prior_learning_assessment/experiential-essays/essay-topics.html
2. Some essays have specific experience requirements. I have checked the essay description and I meet all of the experience requirements listed.
3. I have written and included a 1,500 to 2,100 word autobiography; autobiography is only required with first Experiential Learning Essay, subsequent essays do not require additional autobiographies.
4. I have written an experiential essay: 3,000 to 4,500 words for 3 credit essay
5. My essay is written in first person (1st) without references.
6. I have written to all four (4) areas of [Kolb's model of learning](#).
7. I have addressed all of the required subtopics in each of the four areas of Kolb's model of learning.
8. I have included supporting documentation that validates my personal/professional experience with the essay course description/topic.
9. My essay is based on personal, life learning experiences, not based on research, history, or another individual's learning experiences.

Kolb's Model

Below is a description of Kolb's Model. All experiential essays must be written following Kolb's Model. Below you will find the four sections of Kolb's Model, a brief description of the section, and a sample of how that section should be addressed. The samples are pulled from the sample essay found on the PLA website, and it is recommended that you review the sample essay for a more complete example of how to write an experiential essay in Kolb's Model. The words on this page do not count toward the essay length requirement.

1. Description of Concrete Experience

Description: Concrete experience represents your personal participation with the people, places, activities, and events of an experience. You should describe your involvement relative to the experience, demonstrating the opportunity for learning.

Sample: *My career in public relations started off as a staff assistant in the Public Information Office of a community college system. After two years of on-the-job training, I was promoted to the position of community relations officer.*

2. Reflections

Description: Reflections represent your thinking and processing relative to the experience. You should demonstrate your learning by describing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through the reflective process.

Sample: *I have observed that some organizations are very good at garnering free publicity. They appear at local events and frequently appear as experts in television and newspaper interviews.*

3. Generalizations/Principles/Theories

Description: Generalizations, principles, and theories are constructs that organize and guide academic learning. A typical college course is built around several such generalizations, principles, and/or theories.

In this stage, you identify and describe the generalizations, principles, and/or theories to demonstrate your learning outcomes. These learning outcomes result from analyzing and reflecting on your experience. The generalizations, principles, and/or theories should be comparable to those addressed in typical college courses and should match the course description selected.

Sample: *Whether working with large or small one-owner organizations, it makes no difference in establishing rules, guidelines, or policies regarding image and public relations. Developing a detailed plan of action makes it much easier to schedule and implement appropriate applicable strategies.*

4. Testing and Application

Description: *Testing and/or application represent situations in which the new learning can be used. You should describe how you did, or could in the future, test and/or apply what you learned.*

Sample: *A fun promotional idea that emerged as a by-product profit center for the bookstore was t-shirts. We printed t-shirts with the bookstore logo on the back with advertisements for the bookstore on the front.*

Name:	Ima Student
Date:	06/02/11
Individual Record Number:	0123456789
Approved Essay Title:	Bereavement and Loss

Enter your name, the date, your IRN, and the approved essay title of the essay topic you have chosen from the PLA website. When you are ready to begin writing the essay, type out the essay subtopics as they appear in the essay course description, and follow the four steps of Kolb's model.

Describe the experiences that taught you about the subtopic, reflect on that experience, explain the principles learned, and then explain how those principles were tested and applied. You are then ready to move on to the next subtopic. Follow this process until you meet the length requirement, and have addressed all required subtopics. ***Word count begins at the first subtopic.**

Subtopic (1): Identity Crisis That Occurs When One Loses a Significant Person

Description of Concrete Experience: 1984 began with so much promise. The summer Olympics were to be held in my hometown of Los Angeles, California, Cabbage Patch Kids were all the rage and I was going to finally be a Bat Mitzvah. While technically I lived under my parent's roof, it was my paternal grandmother who assumed the role of "mother" to me at an early age. Sarah, my paternal grandmother, was a very special person. She was a devout, traditional Jew in a modern world and she was responsible for setting the backbone that has become my life today. While 1984 held much promise, it was also the year I made a mistake that I will regret for the rest of my life.

I was twelve (almost thirteen), and according to Jewish law, on the verge of becoming a woman. My grandmother wanted to watch the Olympic torch run by her home and bribed me with a "Cabbage Patch" doll, if, I could just afford her these few moments. I was as eager as a puppy begging for a treat and I had no concept of time. All I knew was I desired virtually needed that doll and nothing could come between that. When my grandmother asked, almost begged for my patience, I responded in anger and screamed, "I hate you." It has been twenty- six years and I

still remember her response: “someday Samantha, I will be dead and you will regret those words.” Well, someday happened just months later and I learned the most valuable lesson of my life.

It was a sweltering September day, Rosh Hashanah, the most religious of the Jewish holidays. It was a time of repentance, a time when G-D opened the book of life and evaluated who shall live and who shall die. We had just completed services and went to lunch at my favorite restaurant. During lunch, my Grandmother excused herself to the restroom and as time went on and she didn’t return, I went to the restroom to find her. I was thirteen at the time and completely unprepared for what I found. My grandmother was lying on the floor of the bathroom, mummified with thin, gauze-like strands of toilet paper. I asked her what she was doing and she told me she was cold, yet beads of sweat ran down her face and she was obviously in tremendous pain. My Grandmother left the restaurant, never to see the light of day again. She was transported to a hospital, where she deteriorated and subsequently passed away on December 26, 1984 at the young age of seventy-three.

The call came early December 26, 1984, a day I had already come to fear, for my paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather had both passed away on that day, in different years prior. The phone rang with an eerie ring, and I automatically knew that I would have a third grandparent to mourn on December 26. When my mother confirmed the news I feared, I felt as if the light of my life had been turned off. Life went black for me and I felt lost, alone and desperate. My Grandmother was not just my “grandmother” she was everything: my “mother”, my protector, my mentor and my best friend. Without her, I felt an uncertainty about my life, my future and how I would ever exist without her by my side. Everything that I knew in my life was about to change. I felt as if the rug had been pulled out beneath me, or a movie stopped at

the height of its plot. It seemed cruel to me that G-D didn't take me instead of her, as I could not see myself living without her. Her death was so unexpected, the thought of not having her dance at my wedding or hold my child was not even a factor in my life, especially not at the age of thirteen. To complicate matters, I was on Christmas break from school and had no friends I could turn to. No one my age could relate, so I felt further alienated in my grief.

Reflections: I watched my parents grieve. My mother derived strength from the loss, vowing to step in where my Grandmother left off, an idea I was not comfortable with at the time. My father, on the other hand, became paralyzed with grief. His anger, pain and despondency became the norm in our household and we became a family in crisis. We watched him curse G-D, denounced my coveted Jewish religion, blame everybody and everything, and then eventually come to us, broken, and in need of fortification, love and understanding. It was more than any thirteen year old should ever go through, watching my father, my "super hero" crumble at the time when I needed him the most. Everything that was my world had changed, and I felt that I know longer knew who I was.

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: Witnessing my father's grief, albeit frightening, taught me to navigate the uncharted, rocky terrain of grieving. I understood from his actions, that there was a certain method of grieving and no matter how old or young you were, when you lost someone you love, you would experience the full spectrum of emotions. I knew that when people lost a loved one, they often felt hopeless and helpless, lonely and scared and often times angry and mad. They lost touch with who they were prior to the loss and became consumed with the loss. Many people confuse the loss of a loved one with loss of their identity. They remain living, yet a piece of them dies along with their loved one.

Testing and Application: I loved my Grandmother but I wasn't ready to allow myself to die with her. I was only thirteen years old and had my whole life ahead of me. I knew that part of me did leave with her but I also knew that the part of me that did die with her was replaced with a rebirth of her and I was determined to find a way to live. I tried my Father's grief on for size and I allowed myself to really grieve, to embrace and really feel each emotion that I was faced with, and I found that by doing this, I could prepare for the next stage of loss, healing.

Subtopic (2): Conditions & Symptoms That Accompany Acute Grief

Description of Concrete Experience: While I had an understanding of grief and had hopes of healing, I knew I had a long way to go. Reverberations of my exchange with my grandmother before the Olympic torch passed played in the back of my mind day in and day out. I was laden with regret, riddled with shame and guilt and fraught with pain, loneliness and desperation. I no longer found solace in the faith that sustained me, spending time with my friends was more than I could bear, and I had little desire to do any of the things that I derived pleasure in prior. The only comfort I found was when I curled up in a little ball and rocked myself to music, curled up from dusk to dawn and sometimes, when allowed, from dawn until dusk. Days melded into each other and soon, the months passed without me ever taking notice.

Reflections: I remember being mesmerized at the audacity of the sun to rise each day, when I felt I was dying inside. To me, no matter how beautiful the day was, darkness cloaked me and I succumbed to my grief. I felt so alone, estranged from life, but in retrospect, I wasn't. My father was just down the hall, imbued by his own grief, loneliness and fear and while merely gypsum and wallpaper separated us, it seemed as if we were a stratosphere apart, yet we each were experiencing the exact same symptoms of grief.

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: With only thirteen years of life experience under my belt, I lacked the comprehension that what I was experiencing was normal symptoms of grief, and just began to embrace it as my new life. I was too young to know that people who experience grief often experienced depression, a loss of will to live and often times retreat into their own lives, shutting others out.

Testing and Application: There were times where I tried to break out of my darkness, cautiously inviting my father out for a burger, but once we actual got out, it was apparent each of us could not wait to return home to our grief. I sometimes would wake up with the desire to take on the day, but would soon remember the state of my life, and would retreat to my little ball, rocking myself to music, allowing the days to float on by. I had embodied one of those “grieving” individuals and was not only depressed, but I, too, loss my will to live and shut others out.

Subtopic (3): Discuss the Patterns & Stages of the Grieving Process

Description of Concrete Experience: Ironically, I was no stranger to grief and loss. My Grandmother’s husband, my Grandfather, passed away two years, exactly to the day, prior. While I loved my Grandfather deeply, I was too young to comprehend the magnitude of losing him. The loss of my Grandmother as I embraced the beginning of my teenager years was an entirely different blow. I experienced all the stages of grief, from anger, to fear to regret and complete and total devastation. I was mad at G-D for taking her away from me and yet I was desperate for him to save me from the pain. I felt betrayed by my Grandmother for giving up on me and yet I missed her so terribly I would have given anything to just hold her hand one last time. I took all of her photos down so I wouldn’t have to look at my pain, and yet secretly I revered them. I wanted to sleep all the time, yet my dreams always took me back to her, so I

tried to stay up to not go there again and again. I replayed every conversation I could remember and questioned whether or not I said I loved her enough. Did she know what she meant to me? Did she know that I would live with regret for the rest of my life for telling her I hated her? My life became a dichotomy and I was torn by my grief.

Reflections: I remembered that my Grandmother had actually experienced many of the same emotions that I was feeling when she lost my Grandfather, her love of over 50 years. She was mad, betrayed, lonely and confused, as she lost her other half and I remember witnessing her grief and asking her if she would “die of a broken heart?” Now I was asking myself if I, too, would die of a broken heart or if there was a way that I could still reclaim my life. The problem with reclaiming my life was the guilt that I experienced if I allowed myself to be happy again. I felt that if I were ever to embrace happiness again I would somehow betray my Grandmother. I had decided that my grief kept her memory alive and if I were to let that go, I would ultimately be letting her go. The truth was on the contrary; holding on to my grief would not allow me to remember all the wonderful things we shared together.

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: I was experiencing the same grief other people went through. I felt the shock, the anger, the loneliness and despair that I somehow thought was reserved for other people. Where I struggled was with reflecting not only on my Grandmother’s life, but on her death, and ultimately choosing acceptance.

Testing and Application: My Grandmother slowly emerged from her grief. She began to test the waters by doing what she loved best, cooking. Then she moved on to venturing out of the house with her grandchildren and finally, while I never thought she returned to her old self, she assumed a new life without my Grandfather. My Grandmother’s final lesson to me came not within her lifetime, but with her death. I began to emulate the stages and steps she took in

dealing with her grief, and I gave myself permission to take the necessary steps to reclaim my life. I was ready to accept life without her.

Subtopic (4): Examine Coping with Grief, Alternatives and Choosing Change

Description of Concrete Experience: Armed with the permission I gave myself to reclaim my life, I began to pick up the pieces and cope with my grief. I struggled with the guilt that I felt in moving on, but began to take my life minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour. Coping with grief I found, was different than any other feeling or experience I had encountered. Coping with grief was not something that happened to you, but something you participate in, a lesson I learned slowly.

Reflections: While I never felt there was an alternative to experiencing the grief in the way that I did, I was very happy to begin to see the sun shine again and I began to choose change. I relieved myself of the responsibility of carrying on the grief eternally and embraced the idea that I could continue to honor my Grandmother's memory while living. I began to think about how my Grandmother would want me to live, how I could actively best serve her life and how I could continue to make her proud. Everything she instilled in me still lived within me and I was not about to let all her hard work go to waste. While it appeared that I wasted a year of my life grieving, I learned a tremendous amount and felt I was much wiser than my now fourteen years of life. It was an immeasurably painful time for me, yet one that implored me to grow more than I have ever done since.

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: One of the lessons I learned from my grief is that people cope with grief in a variety of ways. My Mother was devastated by the loss of my Grandmother, yet she found strength in the loss and transformed herself into the mother and

woman she always set out to be. My Father on the other hand was incapacitated and it took years for him to cope with his grief.

Testing and Application: I, however, found myself in between the two of them. I was first devastated by the loss, but then empowered at the idea of carrying on my Grandmother's memory. I began to set small goals for myself; going to the grocery store with my Mother or watching a movie with my younger brother. Coping with grief to me was simply stepping out of my room for any amount of time, and once I began to be comfortable doing this, I would move the bar a bit higher and challenge myself to leave the house. There were many days I failed, but I persevered. One triumph begot another and I was soon on my way to reclaiming my life. While coping with my grief seemed slow at times, it was the perfect speed for me. When I emerged from my grief, I found I was a better person in so many ways.

Subtopic (5): Contrast "Normal Grieving" with "Chronic Grief"

Description of Concrete Experience: Even at the young age of fourteen, I knew that what my father was experiencing went beyond normal grief. He could not find closure and could not reclaim his life. I exhausted myself trying to pry him from his grief; I engaged him endlessly and tried to reach him on a variety of levels, always to no avail. My efforts to pluck him from his grief failed, but my understanding of grief deepened.

Reflections: As I look back upon the years immediately following the death of my Grandmother, I realize that I experienced normal, healthy grief. While there were periods of complete devastation, I was able to move through them and eventually move on with my life. My father, on the other hand, experienced chronic grief. He continued to covet the grief he was experiencing and never allowed himself to move on. I would see him out in public, perhaps at a

dinner party, just going through the motions, no one noticing the grief, yet I knew all too well what he was thinking. He couldn't wait to get home to his grief.

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: Grief is as individual as the individual who is experiencing it. There are no "rules" to grieving, just emotions that need to be dealt with.

Normal grieving, which I discovered later, does have a pattern. The pattern starts with anger, and then moves to self-reflection, loneliness, pain, tears and desperation. However, while it is normal for all of these emotions to be experienced during the grieving process, part of normal grieving is also finding the strength to move on. Chronic grieving is not allowing one's self to move past the grieving process and embrace the change that ultimately allows individuals to reclaim their life.

Testing and Application: I learned there was a time and a place for people to come out of their grief and no matter how an individual is coaxed they must come out when they are ready to. I let go of my Father's grief around the same time I let go of mine. It was cathartic on one hand because I felt that in letting his grief go, I was truly starting over, yet on the other hand, I struggled with the idea of leaving him behind. Ultimately I knew that I could only save myself and the time had come to move on.

Subtopic (6): Discuss Growth Towards Normalcy and Improvement

Description of Concrete Experience: As I was emerging from my grief, I asked my Mother how life would ever be normal again. I absolutely could not envision life ever having any semblance again. My Mother, with her newfound strength and wisdom, turned to me and told me that life would now take on a "new normal" and it was up to me to embrace it. I thought about what a new normal meant to me, and while I loved my old normal, I knew it was time to move on and

welcome the change. The first thing I did was re-frame my Grandmother's photo and place it prominently on my desk. She was the first person I saw when I rose and the last I saw before I lied down. Her smiling face gave me strength and it was for her that I began to thrive in my new life. My mother also empowered me with some very special, classified information. She told me that my Grandmother lived in my pocket and she was with me where ever I went. She told me that if I needed her, all I had to do was reach in my pocket and my Grandmother would be there.

Reflections: I still think about my Grandmother everyday and carry her in my pocket. Her memory never has faded and I always go back to her when I am in need. All these years later, I still remember a poem that was read at Rosh Hashanah services the very last day my Grandmother attended Temple. The poem began: *birth is a beginning and death a destination and life is a journey.*

Generalizations, Principles and Theories: Before my Grandmother passed away, my life was about the destination. I looked from point "A" to point "B" and so on. I viewed each stage of my life as just that, a stage and never paid attention to the "journey" that got me there. I think many people also live their life moving from stage to stage, with the destination on the forefront of their mind, but not the journey that takes them there. Its unfortunate that it takes a life altering event like losing a loved one to implore us to embrace new normal's, but if there is ever a silver lining in losing someone you love, it is the journey it takes to overcome grief and carry out the memory of the loved one who is no longer with us.

Testing and Application: Overcoming my grief gave me the power to become everything my Grandmother wanted me to be. At fifteen years old I was confirmed, a not so traditional Jewish ceremony which solidifies an individuals belief in the religion. I approached that ceremony with a conviction I never knew I possessed. Pursuing my confirmation was more than just

solidifying my belief in the religion, for me it was reacquainting myself with G-D. I knew my Grandmother was smiling down upon me as I read my Torah portion and it was at that moment that I was not only proud of how far I had come but knew there was no hurdle that I could not overcome.

It is twenty-six years later and I still awake each day to the photo of my Grandmother. I still carry her in my pocket and go to her almost daily. I have experienced subsequent losses after my Grandmother and have taken the experience I had in losing her to help me get through the pain of other losses. I have learned to allow myself to feel pain, to experience each and every emotion and then give myself permission to move forward. The short thirteen years that I was blessed to have my Grandmother pale in comparison to the lifelong lessons that my Grandmother taught me in her death. While birth is the beginning and death is the destination, it is how we live the journey that makes the difference. My Grandmother's death taught me to live my life and embrace the journey. It is this lesson that allowed me to forgive myself for telling her that I hated her and has freed me to become the woman that I know she would have been proud of.