

BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER TALK

TRANSFER AND ARTICULATION NEWS

Getting Started on the Admissions Essay

By Edwin Roman, Academic and Transfer Resources Coordinator

Many college and university applications require an admissions essay that allows you to provide unique content not found in other sections of the application. It is an opportunity for distinction that grades and credentials cannot fully convey. Typical essay questions ask you to share your story via personal information such as plans, goals and why you want to attend that particular institution.

Whenever I work with a student having difficulty getting started on an admissions essay, I share my experience of the first BCC student I worked with who applied for admission to NYU in 2004. Back then, the admissions essay question asked why you are interested in studying at NYU.

The student's first draft spoke solely of NYU's reputation and while it was well written, it didn't reveal who she was. When we met to discuss her essay, I conveyed that NYU didn't need to be reminded of their reputation and asked her what she wanted to study. She replied that her goal was to become a math teacher. I then asked what influenced this decision. She said that she was inspired by a story her late mother, who was a math teacher, once shared with her. When her mother was a little girl, she would take her dolls and arrange them as if they were in a classroom and using a small chalkboard, taught them math. It was her most cherished memory of her late mother: as a little girl teaching dolls math. The story was also what sparked her own love of education and math.

After she shared her story I said, "What you just told me---THAT is your essay! No one else could write this---it is truthful and moving."

I then advised her to try free writing without worrying about application instructions such as word count. I encouraged her not to place much emphasis on quality when writing her first draft. What was important was to get her story written, using the memory as the starting point. Be mindful that you can't write one draft; it can take several weeks and drafts (we met four times to work on this essay for NYU). When proofreading your second draft, don't get stuck looking at particulars like spelling and grammar; find your essay's weaknesses and work on those. Grammar and spelling should be closely looked at in the final drafts.

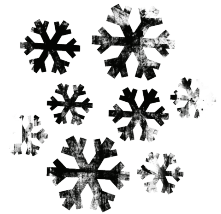
Only you can determine what is worth writing about, but I would encourage writing about something that's important to you. Don't just describe, provide some reflection by conveying what you learned and how it changed you.

Interestingly, this student came back to me after she graduated from NYU and was working as a math teacher and asked me to review her graduate school statement. She did, once again, mention her mother's influence:

"A teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence stops."

We are, after all, the products of our past.

Winter 2016
Volume 2, Issue 1



Quote of the Season:

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

- Maya Angelou,
American author, poet,
and civil rights activist

