

“This I Believe” Essay Writing Instructions

Write your own statement of personal belief. We understand how challenging this is – it requires such intimacy that no one else can do it for you. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

1. **Tell a story.** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when the belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work and family, and tell of the things that you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching – it can even be funny – but it should be real. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.
2. **Be brief.** Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. That’s about three minutes when you read aloud at your natural pace.
3. **Name your belief.** If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on a core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.
4. **Be positive.** Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we”. Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.
5. **Be personal.** Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

In introducing the original series, host Edward R. Murrow said, “Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent.” We would argue that the need is as great now as it was 50 years ago. We are eager for your contribution.

Adapted from: <http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/guide.html>