This I Believe Essay-Writing Guidelines

We invite you to contribute to this project by writing and submitting 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:

**Tell a story about you**: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things 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.

**Be brief**: Your statement should be between 500 and 600 words. That’s about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

**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 one core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.

**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.

**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.

For this project, we are also guided by the original *This I Believe series* and the [**producers’ invitation**](https://thisibelieve.org/1950s/invitation/) to those who wrote essays in the 1950s. Their advice holds up well and we are abiding by it. Please consider it carefully in writing your piece.

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.

Additional Items to Consider:

Style: A personal or familiar essay should be written in your voice and from your

perspective. While you are watching your grammar more carefully than you might in everyday writing, you are still writing as you.

o Do not use words that are not natural to you.

o Do not use the personal pronoun you. Instead, use I/me/my when referring to your own experience, or we/us/our when extending that to society as a whole. When appropriate use the specific nouns: i.e. women, men, student, teachers, teens, dragons, etc.

Purpose: The purpose of this essay is simply to explain your belief

o Do not try to convince or preach to your readers. Simply explain what it is you believe and why you believe it’s important.

Audience: The audience for this essay is a general audience. Think of this as simply

talking to your friends, family, or peers.

Limitations: You may not choose to write about family, or friends as the topic of your essay. You may use those as examples in the essay, but they cannot be the topic.

Works Cited

"This I Believe Essay-Writing Guidelines." *This I Believe Essay-Writing Guidelines*. This I Believe, Inc., n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015.