

GSW 1110 // 13137L-70996
Fall 2011
Grohowski

Arguing A Position: *This I Believe* Assignment #1

Prewriting: Monday, August 26 @ 10:30 am (via google docs)
First draft: Friday, September 9 @10:30 am
Final Draft: Monday, September 12 @ 10:30 am

For thousands of years communities of faith have identified themselves with short, carefully worded statements of belief, or creeds. Even today, when someone claims to follow a set of beliefs or principles, we often identify these as a credo, literally Latin for "I believe."

In the 1950s, journalist Edward R. Murrow hosted a weekly radio series inviting listeners "to write about the core beliefs that guide your daily life. In 2005, *This I Believe* was revived for NPR as a way "to encourage people to...develop respect for beliefs different from their own."

Pre-writing due Monday August 26 @ 12 am:

In order to write a *This I Believe* essay, you must spend a considerable amount of time familiarizing yourself with the concept of the NPR *This I Believe* program. Begin by visiting the website: thisibelieve.org. From there you can either read essays (by people your age; by people from your state; by people who have similar values) by searching for such here: <http://thisibelieve.org/search/>. You may also listen to *This I Believe* [credos] on topics of your choice by clicking here: <http://thisibelieve.org/stories/>.

You are to read or listen to 3 credos (minimum) and respond, in writing to the following questions; such will facilitate the process of what you absorbed through reading or listening to the *This I Believe* credos and help you compose your own works.

Remember, full bibliographic (MLA 2009) information is essential for each "essay" you plan to write about. Consult *A Writer's Resource* for help creating MLA citations.

1. How do the authors establish their own unique voice through each essay?
2. What experiences have shaped the lives of each?
3. How does each respond, physically or emotionally, to these experiences?
4. Does the author effectively argue their position?
5. What are they arguing?

Full credit for this assignment is attributed to thisibelieve.org/educationoutreach.html & <http://thisibelieve.org/guidelines/> & Lisa Watrous.

Please, do not indicate your agreement or disagreement with the essay, simply analyze what you have read or heard. Compose 1-2 paragraphs for each (3) credo. The purpose of this mini-assignment, via these questions, is to identify the rhetorical strategies at play in these works.

First Draft: Friday, September 9 @ 10:30 am:

Traditionally, creeds are communal texts read and repeated in worship to remind the faithful of common beliefs. Religious historian Jaroslav Pelikan describes a moment in the spiritual development of a people—speaking of the Massai of Africa—where they can no longer repeat the prayers and creeds of their teachers but must find their own words for their own context. In many ways, the same is true of college students moving away from family, neighborhood, and hometown, and trying to find beliefs and a voice that is truly their own.

Tell a story: 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 350 and 500 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. Share 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. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

Be personal: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. Try reading 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.

Please also remember to:

- Include appropriate background information.
- Have a clear belief in which you have a solid position.
- Acknowledge opposing views and refute them.

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- Maintain an authentic and consistent voice (i.e. your own) throughout your essay (see below).
- Gain your audience's confidence and respect in order to convince the readers, which entails identifying a target audience and appealing directly to them (their beliefs, values, backgrounds, etc.)

Keep the following in mind as you work on your prewriting, writing, and rewriting:

- Have a thesis statement. This is your core belief. Such will keep you on track during your writing. Everything should tie back to your thesis statement.
- Argument is used to persuade; remember violence is not an effective rhetorical (argumentative) strategy.

Questions to consider in the planning of your draft:

- Who is my audience?
- What is the issue? Why is it important?
- What does my audience already know about this issue?
- What is my position?
- What is the purpose of my essay?
- How should I write my introduction to engage readers' attention?
- How should I arrange my arguments? (From weakest to strongest? From least to most obvious?)
- What counterarguments should I mention? Where should I include them?

In essence, you are to compose a 350-500 word personal essay describing an idea or principle you believe in. You are to have a firm position, in which you argue to readers the purpose for confirming, challenging, or changing your readers' views on the issue. This means you must present your argument clearly and address at least one counterargument. For this exercise to be meaningful, you must make it wholly your own. This short statement isn't all you believe; it's simply a way to introduce others to some *thing* you value. In spite of the name, your belief need not be religious or even public. You may decide to focus on commitments to family, service, political action, or the arts. As you look for a focus, try to choose concrete language and to find something that helps others understand your past, present, and future choices.

Final Draft: Monday, September 12 @ 10:30 am:

Elements of a personal essay:

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Authentic voice. The writer must create a narrative persona (or stance) that the reader believes authentic, or else the text risks coming off as trite or condescending. Voice is a difficult feature to discuss in writing, but readers can describe the stance a writer is taking as they react to a given style, dialogue, and point of view; they must choose whether to believe or identify. Thus, writers must seek to reveal true experiences, moments of relevance, and believed lessons learned; else, write fictional accounts as if they believed them to be true.

Narrative coherence. Most often covered in literary settings, the feature of narrative coherence regards the business of telling stories well: vivid description, controlled and appropriate pacing, subtle transitions, lively dialogue, and rich character development, for example. A personal essay generally relates a story and lessons learned; thus, if the storytelling fails, the whole essay usually fails. The same elements of narration that we celebrate in studies of canonical literature can be studied and applied to student narratives.

Public relevance. At the end of the essay, the reader has the right to ask “So what?” and have it answered. A writer does not merely tell a story for personal reasons, but in order to communicate a larger truth to the reader; the story is the vehicle on which this truth, often metaphorically, rides. The personal essay argues, in a way, that the beauty associated with being a human can often best be expressed through the sharing of stories. Thus, there often appear two distinct sections of a personal essay: narrative and comment. Sometimes they are neatly divided, with an immediate lapsing into a story with brief comments at the end, but such segmenting is not always the case. Other writers will choose to comment along the way, interspersing authorial intrusions into the narrative to call attention to the purpose and public resonance (as to why the audience should care).

As you revise your essay consider the following questions:

1. Essay has an engaging introduction.
2. Belief statement is thoughtful and clear.
3. Essay is organized in a way that supports the belief statement.
4. Author’s voice is present and unique.
5. Essay contains appropriate appeals to the audience’s emotions and/or sense of logic.
6. Student’s writing is thoughtful, reflective, and personal.
7. Storytelling (if present) contains relevant and descriptive details.

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8. Essay has a clear and definitive conclusion.
9. The essay satisfies the reader's question, "so what?" In other words, why should your **audience** care about your belief?
10. The essay is modeled after the "Believe" essays we read and discussed in class, and seems to have an appropriate sense of **audience**.
11. Essay is relatively free of grammar errors and unclear or awkward phrases.
12. Essay is appropriate length.

Resources:

Please remember: You have two textbooks, the Writing Support Center at the Learning Commons, myself, and your peers at your disposal. We are here to assist you in the successful completion of this assignment. Do not hesitate. Reach out.