

This I Believe Essay: Working the Process in Steps

Final Draft Due: Thursday, 9/8

The Basics: After reading sample essays and completing your life map, you will now contribute to the *This I Believe* project by writing your own statement of personal belief.

- Length: 350-500 words
Two typed, double spaced pages
MLA format: 12 pt. Times New Roman with 1" margins with a MLA header
- You will turn in the final draft for a major writing grade.
- You will work the writing process in steps; many of these you will complete outside of class. These steps include the following:
 - ✓ Step 1: Life Map
 - ✓ Step 2: Brainstorming
 - ✓ Step 3: Form and Support
 - ✓ Step 4: Outline
 - ✓ Step 5: Rough Draft
 - ✓ Step 6: Revision
 - ✓ Step 7: Final Draft

While this essay will be written in first person as a personal narrative, the best essays will maintain a clear organization with a thesis that acts as a road map for your ideas. Working the writing process in steps will help you discover and define this thesis.

Name _____

Date _____

Guidelines: Writing a "This I Believe" essay is challenging. It requires self-examination, and many find it difficult to begin.

To be successful, we will work through a reflective writing process. Focus on the following guidelines to uncover your beliefs and express them in a compelling essay:

1. Tell a story
2. Be specific. Take your belief out of the sky and ground it in the events of your life.
3. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed.
4. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does.
5. Your story need not be heartwarming 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.
6. Be positive. Avoid preaching or editorializing. Explain what you do believe, not what you don't believe.
7. Avoid writing in the editorial "we."
Make your essay about you.
Write in the first person.
8. Be personal. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak.
9. 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.
10. Name your belief. If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief.
11. Rather than writing a list, focus on one core belief because two pages is a small amount of space.

Re-Vision Checklist:

- ☐ Has the writer clearly named his or her belief? Is this belief the obvious focus of the essay?
- ☐ Is the essay specific, personal, positive, and real?
- ☐ Does the essay include a title and an attention grabber that creates interest in the introduction?
Does the conclusion summarize the main ideas and “punch home” the main point in a way that leaves the reader with a full and complete picture of your belief?
- ☐ Does the writer tell a story using vivid details, creating a memorable scene, and/or engaging the senses with description?
- ☐ Does the writer use artful transitional devices to move the reader from idea to support to conclusion?
- ☐ Are all of the sentences complete, ending with a period, question mark or exclamation point?
Do the sentences all express a complete thought, passing the “I realize” test?
- ☐ Is the essay free from punctuation and grammar errors?

11th Grade Writing Rubric

Writing Domains	Does Not Meet Standard					Meets Standard			Exceeds Standard			
	Lacking, demonstrates very little or no mastery	Seriously limited, demonstrates little mastery		Inadequate, but demonstrates developing mastery		Competent, demonstrates adequate mastery		Effective, demonstrates consistent mastery	Outstanding, demonstrates clear consistent mastery		Weight	Total
Writing Process: Student uses prewriting and revision strategies to complete writing process	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	x1	
Ideas: Student develops a controlling idea (thesis).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	x1	
Organization: Paper has a beginning, middle, and end. There is logical order with grouping of ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	x3	
Student uses precise and relevant evidence to develop paragraphs of five sentences or more.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	x3	
Conventions: Student has controlled conventions with relatively few errors that do not distract from overall appeal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	x2	

Step 2: Brainstorm For What You Believe

Respond to each statement by putting a plus sign (+) if you agree with it, a minus sign (-) if you disagree, and a question mark (?) if you are unsure of your belief.

- _____ Lessons are learned, not taught.
- _____ "The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up" (Paul Valery)
- _____ When in doubt, leap. One needs a little courage to live.
- _____ Boredom is the price one pays for not enjoying everything.
- _____ "Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it" (Confucius)
- _____ "That which does not destroy us makes us stronger" (Fredric Nietzsche)
- _____ "When in doubt, tell the truth" (Mark Twain)
- _____ Life is fair.
- _____ Words can hurt.
- _____ Police are your friends.
- _____ What goes around comes around.
- _____ How you act in a crisis shows who you really are.
- _____ Love conquers all.
- _____ An eye for an eye...
- _____ People learn from their mistakes.
- _____ You can't depend on anyone else; you can only depend on yourself.
- _____ If you smile long enough, you become happy.
- _____ Miracles do happen.
- _____ There is one special person, a soul mate, for everyone.
- _____ Money can't buy happiness.
- _____ Doing what's right means obeying the law.

Select one of the belief statements from the brainstorm (or write your own) and expand that statement with the following brainstorming exercise:

Belief statement: _____

Synonyms: Expand the belief statement with a list of as many words and phrases that restate the belief: _____

An experience in your life that shows this belief in action: _____

Difficulties of upholding this belief and how you uphold it: _____

Imagine yourself in the experience you describe above. Now visualize this scene with imagery. How does it look, sound, smell, taste, feel? Be vivid, and bring this scene to life:

Now, review your brainstorming and life map – these will become the supporting details in your essay – for the ideas in relation to the belief statement above.

Do you need to refine, restate, or redefine the belief statement in order for it to become the thesis for your essay? Remember that a specific and personal belief statement will have more power than a broad generalization.

Your belief statement as the guiding thesis for your essay: _____

Step 5: Support Strategies; Nonfiction Forms

Define the **DRAPES** strategies as methods for supporting your thesis statement:

D is for _____:

R is for _____:

A is for _____:

P is for _____:

E is for _____:

S is for _____:

Using the DRAPES strategy, what forms would best support your thesis statement?

Choose two forms and briefly sketch how you could use each strategy for your essay:

1. _____

2. _____

Now that you have begun to outline how you will support your essay, you can decide which form of nonfiction essay you will write. There are three types:

Personal Narrative: _____

Personal Essay: _____

Personal Memoir: _____

Which form do you feel will best suit your belief statements and the way you will support it?
