

Tips for Writing Your *This I Believe* Essay

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 intense self-examination, and no one else can do it for you. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

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-warm 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 a core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.

Be positive: Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Write about 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. On the following page, you will see the producers' 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.

Name: _____ Date: _____

VALUES ACTIVITY SHEET

Below is a list of some of the values that may be important to you. First, define the value in a few words (use a dictionary if you need to). Then, put a star next to the five values that are the most important to you. Be prepared to explain why you feel this way!

Honesty: _____	Cooperation: _____
Integrity: _____	Enthusiasm: _____
Compassion: _____	Self-Control: _____
Love: _____	Leadership: _____
Empathy: _____	Confidence: _____
Respect: _____	Skill: _____
Faith: _____	Sincerity: _____
Knowledge: _____	Reliability: _____
Wisdom: _____	Patience: _____
Freedom: _____	Flexibility: _____
Creativity: _____	Responsibility: _____
Dedication: _____	Hope: _____
Loyalty: _____	Charity: _____
Success: _____	Prudence: _____

What Do You Think?

In the space in front of each belief statement, write an "A" if you agree or a "D" if you disagree.

- _____ 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 for everyone.
- _____ Money can't buy happiness.
- _____ Killing is wrong.
- _____ Doing what's right means obeying the law.

Name: _____ Date: _____

IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. For each question, identify at least one value from yesterday's activity that played a role in this event.

- When did you first realize your family loves you?
- When did you learn that it is better to tell the truth?
- Who was the first person to make you feel invincible?
- When did you realize you could be anything you want to be?
- When did you learn that life isn't always fair?
- Who taught you that sometimes things don't work out the way you want them to?
- When did you learn that you can't always get what you want?
- How did you learn about the Tooth Fairy, or other characters?
- Has anyone ever tested your faith?
- Have you ever done something that you regret? What did you learn from that moment?

These questions are not always easy to answer. Take enough time to think. If you are stuck, ask your teacher, a friend, or someone at home to help you "unglue" your memories!

Name: _____ Date: _____

MY STORY – MEMORY CHART

Fill in the questions with information about the event you have picked.

1. _____ is the event I am describing.
2. It happened when I was _____.
3. Where did it happen? Describe the place _____

4. _____ were the people involved.
5. Close your eyes and picture yourself on that day. List five adjectives that come to mind.

6. When I think back on this day, it makes me feel _____
_____ inside.
7. I would want to tell people that before this event I thought that

8. Now, I know that _____

9. Some values that were important to me back then were _____

10. Some values that are important to me now are

Personal Writing Prompts For A Writer's Notebook

Let students choose one or more cards from this page as a prompt for an entry in their Writer's Notebook.

<p>1. Most of us have been in a situation where we made a promise that for one reason or another we were unable to keep.</p> <p>When were you disappointed because someone made you a promise that they failed to keep? Or when did you break a promise that you made to someone else?</p>	<p>4. We all tend to judge people by their appearances, even though looks can be deceiving.</p> <p>Have you ever prejudged someone incorrectly based on their appearance or has someone ever prejudged you unfairly based on how you look?</p>
<p>2. All of us are works in progress with a long way to go before we reach our full potential.</p> <p>In what skill or area are you still working to make progress?</p>	<p>5. Everyone has problems or challenges to overcome.</p> <p>What obstacles are you proud to have faced and conquered?</p>
<p>3. Our society uses the word <i>hero</i> in many different ways?</p> <p>How do you define <i>hero</i>, and who is a hero in your life?</p>	<p>6. There is a famous adage: "To err is human, to forgive divine."</p> <p>When did you feel divine because you were able to forgive someone for their mistake? When did someone act divine by forgiving you when you were wrong?</p>

Personal Essay vs. Transactive Writing

Personal Essay	Transactive Writing
Communicates the significance of a central idea or insight that has a deep personal meaning to the writer	Conveys information to a reader who knows less than the writer; may attempt to persuade a reader to take a particular action or believe a certain way
Purpose is more reflective, although the tone may sound persuasive	Purpose is more persuasive, an attempt to convince others to agree with the writer's position
Development of the piece is based upon the writer's personal experiences or anecdotes	Development of the piece is based upon research from credible sources
Written in first person; more conversational or entertaining in style	Written in third person; more issue-driven and formal or academic in style
Appears in an essay or Op-ed format	Appears in a real-world form such as a letter, an editorial, or a feature article
More subjective in tone	More objective in tone
Rarely requires documentation	Often requires documentation
More informal in tone, language, and subject matter	More formal in tone, language, and topic selection

Show Me the Money...or at Least the Story that Makes It Real

Choose a belief that is common to all group members. Record your common belief in the space below. Then each member of the group should tell a story that either shows the belief in action or explains why the storyteller believes what (s)he does.

Belief Statement: _____

Story from _____
Group member name

Story from _____
Group member name

Story from _____
Group member name

Story from _____
Group member name

Seeing Is Believing

Belief is more than just saying what you think. It's about acting in a way that supports the belief. Choose a statement from *What Do You Believe?* and, with a partner, come up with as many stories, images, and words that communicate that belief. Create a large poster that will help other people understand what this belief means through your eyes.

Include things like:

<p>Synonyms (words and phrases that mean the same thing as the belief statement) OR words/phrases associated with this concept.</p> <p><i>Example: Life is fair.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Even-stein</i>• <i>You get out of it as much as you put into it</i>• <i>You get what you deserve</i>	<p>Pictures/images of belief in action—pictures may be narrative or metaphoric.</p>	<p>Stories that show what belief means.</p>
<p>Clearing up misconceptions about this belief—i.e.,</p> <p><i>Love conquers all does not mean that you shouldn't give your daughter an allowance OR a really nice gift for no reason at all</i></p>	<p>Rules that govern this belief—i.e.,</p> <p><i>To learn from your mistakes:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>You need to know when you've made a mistake.</i>2. <i>You need to stifle all defensive impulses, etc.</i>	<p>A Top Five list, for example:</p> <p><i>Top Five Daily Miracles</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. <i>I get up every day.</i>4. <i>Algebra II is 1st period so by the time I wake up it's over.</i>3. <i>There's such a thing as Fruit Loops.</i>2. <i>We beat _____ HS in football.</i>1. <i>Chocolate.</i>

Posters should be legible, labeled with belief statement, visual, and attractive and should fill the entire space.

Cool Quotes for Teens

Each of the following adages appears in a text called Teen Quotes. They are beliefs of both famous and not-so-famous individuals. To which quotation(s) below can you make a text-to-self connection based on your own life experiences?

1. The good or ill of a man lies within his own will. – Epictetus
2. The greatest and most important problems in life are all in a certain sense insoluble. They can never be solved, but only outgrown. – Carl Jung
3. The greatest thing about man is his ability to transcend himself, his ancestry, and his environment and to become what he dreams of being. – Tully C. Knoles
4. The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts... take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable nature. – Marcus Aurelius
5. The life given us by nature is short, but the memory of a life well spent is eternal. – Cicero
6. The love we give away is the only love we keep. – Elbert Hubbard
7. The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year. – John Foster Dulles
8. The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth.
– Chinese Proverb
9. The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have. – Norman Vincent Peale
10. The only discipline that lasts is self-discipline. – Bum Phillips

Coaching Quotes

Sometimes personal essays are actually inspired by a belief statement or quotation from someone famous whom the writer respects. Do any quotations below ring true with what you yourself believe? If so, one of these quotations might offer a thesis around which you can frame a personal essay about an insight that has made a real difference in your own life.

1. "I have found that being honest is the best technique I can use. Right up front, tell people what you're trying to accomplish, and what you're willing to sacrifice to accomplish it." – Lee Iococca
2. "I know you've heard it a thousand times before. But it's true—hard work pays off. If you want to be good, you have to practice, practice, practice. If you don't love something, then don't do it." – Ray Bradbury
3. "If you're not making mistakes, then you're not doing anything. I'm positive that a doer makes mistakes." – John Wooden
4. "It is a paradoxical but profoundly true and important principle of life that the most likely way to reach a goal is to be aiming not at that goal itself but at some more ambitious goal beyond it." – Arnold Toynbee
5. "I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to earth." – Pearl Buck
6. "I don't look to jump over seven-foot bars. I look around for one-foot bars that I can step over." – Warren Buffett
7. "If you deliberately plan on being less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be unhappy for the rest of your life." – Abraham Maslow
8. "If you don't quit, and don't cheat, and don't run home when trouble arrives, you can only win." – Shelley Long
9. "Success in golf depends less on strength of body than upon strength of mind and character." – Arnold Palmer
10. "People of mediocre ability sometimes achieve outstanding success because they don't know when to quit. Most men succeed because they are determined to." – George Allen

Beliefs of John Wooden (Woodenisms)

Sometimes personal essays are actually inspired by a belief statement or quotation from someone famous that the writer respects. Do any quotations below from the famous UCLA basketball coach ring true with what you yourself believe? If so, one of these quotations might offer a thesis around which you can frame a personal essay about an insight that has made a real difference in your own life.

1. A man may make mistakes, but he isn't a failure until he starts blaming someone else.
2. Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there.
3. The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team.
4. Young people need models not critics.
5. Talent is God given; be humble.
Fame is man given; be thankful.
Conceit is self-given; be careful.
6. The journey is greater than the inn.
7. Learn as if you were to live forever;
Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
8. The true athlete should *have* character,
not *be* a character.
9. Do not let what you CANNOT do interfere with what you CAN do.
10. Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.
11. Things turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out.

Things I Have Learned About Life

Personal essays are based on ideas—insights we've learned based on life experiences. Read the insights expressed by others, and then compose a sentence that expresses one thing you've learned about life.

1. I've learned that when I wave to people in the country, they stop what they are doing and wave back. – Age 9
2. I've learned that if you want to cheer yourself up, you should try cheering someone else up. – Age 14
3. I've learned that although it's hard to admit it, I'm secretly glad my parents are strict with me. – Age 15
4. I've learned that if someone says something unkind about me, I must live so that no one will believe it. – Age 39
5. I've learned that there are people who love you dearly but just don't know how to show it. – Age 42
6. I've learned that you can make someone's day by simply sending them a little note. – Age 44
7. I've learned that the greater a person's sense of guilt, the greater his or her need to cast blame on others. – Age 46
8. I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. – Age 48
9. I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you miss them terribly after they die. – Age 53
10. I've learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life. – Age 58
11. I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. – Age 62
12. I've learned that whenever I decide something with kindness, I usually make the right decision. – Age 66
13. I've learned that it pays to believe in miracles. And to tell the truth, I've seen several. – Age 75
14. I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. – Age 82
15. I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch—holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. – Age 85
16. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. – Age 92

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The Top 10 Lessons I Learned From Charlie Brown, By Jim Allen

For 50 years the daily comic strip “Peanuts” entertained millions of readers. Every day, the adventures of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, and the whole gang provided many laugh-out-loud moments while at the same time offering a daily inspiration and lessons on life. I remember the many lessons they taught me....

1. It's okay to be afraid...just don't let your fears control you.

Charlie Brown often sat in bed and spoke of his fears, but no matter how scared he was, he always did the things he wanted to do.

2. Persistence wins out.

Charlie Brown often lost, failed at much, but he never gave up. Even though he knew Lucy was going to pull the football away before he could kick it...Even though he knew the tree was going to eat his kite...Even though he knew his team would lose the ballgame, he kept on trying.

3. It's what you think of yourself that matters most.

Linus carried a security blanket for years and his friends laughed at him. They also laughed at him because he believed in the “Great Pumpkin.”

Pigpen was a walking cloud of dust and dirt and was often regarded unkindly. Both characters, however, were always proud of themselves and believed they were as good as anybody else—and they were right.

4. Sometimes you need to talk.

One thing the “Peanuts” gang understood was the importance of talking things out. Whether leaning up against Schroeder's piano or atop the brick wall, they always had someplace to discuss what was of concern to them.

5. Sometimes you need to listen.

Even crabby, self-indulged Lucy knew the importance of listening. She started the famous ‘Psychiatry Booth’ where any and all could come and be heard.

6. Do what you love to do.

Through all their adventures, Schroeder remained constant in his appreciation of Beethoven and his love of playing the piano. He loved to play piano and that's what he did, regardless of the circumstances. Charlie Brown flew his kite, played baseball, and played football, not just to win (he knew he wouldn't), but because he loved to do those things.

7. It's important to have friends who care.

The “Peanuts” gang was made up of individual characters, each with their own foibles and talents, but through it all they were always there for each other.

8. Big dreams lead to big things!

Snoopy was the biggest dreamer of them all, but his wild imagination often led to even wilder, more fantastic adventures in real life. Snoopy knew that you must have a big dream if you are going to lead a big life.

9. Action creates reality.

As Charlie Brown was reminded time and again after prodding from Linus: It takes action to bring about change. Though he often failed, Chuck took action quite regularly...and every now and again things would go his way.

10. Laugh every day!

While the kids themselves may not have seen the humor in the things they did, Schulz made sure that *we* did. Life is only as serious or as humorous as YOU make it...Lighten up. Go play softball. Fly a kite. Dance with your dog. Smile...It makes people wonder what you're up to.

<http://halife.com/halife/charliebrown.html>. This page used with permission from author, Jim Allen,
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Tips To Add Audience Appeal To Personal Essays

1. Be sure your essay is about something you care strongly enough about to elaborate and wax eloquent or passionate about it. Readers want to know what you know, feel what you feel, and understand exactly where you're coming from.
2. While the idea for the essay must be personal, make the frame big enough to allow your reader to find parallels between your experience and theirs. Give readers the opportunity to say, "Ah! Yes, I've never been there or done that, but I can relate to what the author is talking about." Even if readers have not been on a mission trip to Africa, the effective writer must draw in an audience to show a more universal implication of a very personal experience or belief.
3. If you are writing about a small personal occurrence, put your idea in a context that gives the reader insight to both the small moment and the wider perspective. Think of your essay as a camera lens. You might start by describing a fine detail (a specific moment in the narrative), then opens up the lens to take in the wide view (the general/global backdrop), then close the piece by narrowing back to the fine detail.
4. Use details to draw the reader in. Be specific and avoid using abstract expressions and phrases such as "the best day of my life" or "I'd never known greater grief" to describe emotions of love or loss. Make the emotions real and immediate by noting specifics and details that draw the reader into your experience.
5. Employ all the senses to convey your ideas to the reader: sight, sound, taste, touch, and hearing.
6. Make sure that beyond all the idea development, your readers can summarize the MAIN IDEA that you BELIEVE. You should not have to hit the readers over the head with a summary statement such as "What I am trying to say..." or "What I really mean is..." In fact, such a closing is almost insulting or an indication that you fear you have danced around the belief without making it crystal clear. You must aim to leave the readers clear and satisfied—whether they agree with what you believe or not. Sometimes a brief echo of the opening is the most satisfying clincher to bring a personal essay full circle.

LESSON 6: HOW DO I SUPPORT MY PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY?

Make an overhead or write dramatically on the chalkboard the six letters below. Each one stands for a simple technique that students can use to support their personal beliefs (and in transactive/on-demand writing as well). The strategies below have been adapted from writing guru Barry Lane for use in *This I Believe* compositions.

Explain the term that goes with each letter. Challenge students to think of specific examples from the essays that they have read as part of this unit.

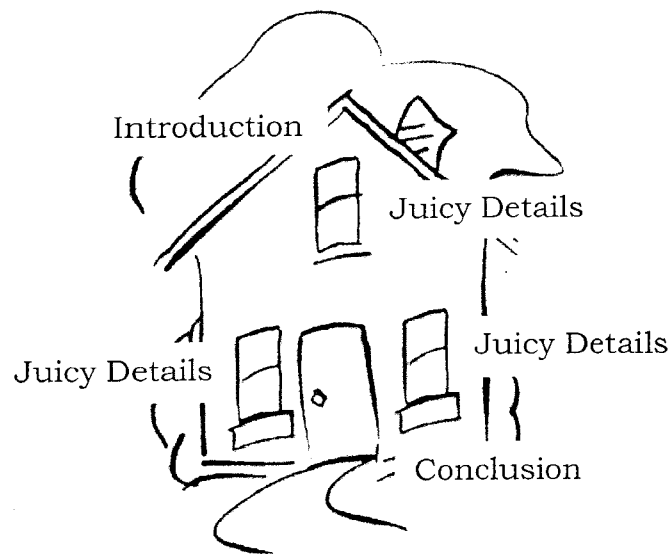
- D Dialogue "If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all," my mother warned me throughout my childhood.
- R Rhetorical Question: "When you are eighty years old, what will you regret that you didn't do?"
- A Anecdote
- P Personal Experience
- E Example
- S Statistic

WRITING WORKSHOP – CREATING PARAGRAPHS

One way to think about writing paragraphs is to envision a house. A house cannot exist without a foundation and a roof—regardless of what is inside the house, those two features are all-important. What exists inside the house, on the other hand, is what makes it unique.

Likewise, paragraphs need an introduction and conclusion sentence to anchor them together. The details in the middle make the paragraph special.

We can picture it like this:*



In terms of the three parts of the paragraph (introduction, juicy details, and conclusion), the introduction and conclusion have a lot in common.

The introduction is like a sneak preview of a movie. It gives the reader an idea of what to expect in the paragraph, but doesn't reveal everything. The introduction must mention the main idea of the paragraph, or the "Big Picture" and engage the reader in some way.

Juicy details provide the most interest for your paragraph. They explain and "prove" the statements made in your introduction.

The conclusion comes back to the main idea, but says it in a different way than the introduction. Conclusions aim to wrap up the paragraph, but try to avoid saying, "This is why..." or "That is why..."

* This visual can be made into a transparency to show students how the introduction and conclusion "support" the juicy details.

WRITER'S WORKSHOP – WRITING THE PARAGRAPH, A BASIC MODEL

After reviewing basic grammar rules and the parts of a paragraph, the house transparency is placed on the overhead. At this point the outline is introduced as a method for pre-writing. The outline format is as follows:

- I. (Topic)
 - a. (Detail 1)
 - b. (Detail 2)
 - c. (Detail 3) and so on...

After discussing this, a sample paragraph is written on the overhead with the students' help. This paragraph, while extremely basic, shows how an outline organizes thoughts. The prompt is "I love pizza because..." An example follows:

- I. Pizza is my favorite food
 - a. Toppings
 - b. Goopy cheese
 - c. Juicy and hot

At this point, the paragraph is written. Each of the topic points under Topic "I" become a full sentence. The concluding sentence is made by going back to the beginning and wrapping up the paragraph. Using the transparency, each sentence fits into one part of the pizza.

An example follows:

Pizza is my very favorite food. I really love all of the toppings I can put on it, like pepperoni and mushrooms. Also, I love it when the cheese is really warm and goopy. My favorite part of a pizza is when it is juicy and hot. I could eat pizza every day.

The rationale for this model is to show how paragraph writing is not a mystery, but rather like a recipe for baking. By following the "recipe" (the outline) students get their ideas on paper and it is less likely they will get stuck when trying to write the paragraph itself. This model also prevents a lot of overlapping details.

WRITER'S WORKSHOP – INTRODUCTIONS

The introduction may just be the most important part of a paragraph or an essay. It is the first thing your reader sees and can interest a potential reader to continue on in your work.

First, we'll focus on introductory sentences.

Introductory sentences set up the rest of your paragraph. They introduce the main idea, without getting too specific. There are several ways you can choose to begin a paragraph, but make sure there is no question as to what the rest of the paragraph will discuss.

Techniques for your introductory sentence:

- Ask a question that gets to the point of your paragraph: "When was the last time you saw someone do the right thing?"
- Make a list: "The next time you go to a museum, make sure you have the right clothes, supplies, and fellow travelers with you!" In this case, each of these list items would be turned into a separate detail sentence.
- Share a story: "I will never forget the last time I had to make a difficult choice." You would then go on to explain what happened.
- Use a quote related to your topic. There are wonderful websites online that provide thousands of quotes for you to use. Make sure you credit the original author!

Techniques and tips for introductory paragraphs:

- Don't wait too long to get into the actual story. If you set up your essay with a quote or unusual fact, make sure you quickly get to the main idea.
- Rhetorical questions are questions that don't really have answers. They are posed in an essay, often in the beginning, to get the reader thinking of a certain topic. Rhetorical questions can be quite effective, but be careful not to overuse them. One or two rhetorical questions can go a long way in terms of effectiveness, but more than that will be overkill. Example: "Have you ever had to trust someone with a secret?"
- Don't worry so much about length here. Sometimes a good two- to three-sentence introduction can say all you need to say.
- Use action: An active voice with strong verbs will grab your reader's attention. Instead of starting out explaining what your essay will be about, tell the reader.

Example: Instead of "This is my story about the day I learned my parents loved me unconditionally," say "My heart soared as I came to a conclusion about the most important value of all: love."

WRITER'S WORKSHOP – JUICY DETAILS

Even though the introduction and conclusion of your essay hold it together (kind of like bookends), it is the juicy details that give your essay personality. There are a few things to keep in mind when working on your detail sentences.

Tips for creating juicy detail sentences that work:

- Stay on track: Don't let your enthusiasm become a runaway train! Keep your details moving in a progressive order, and re-read all work to check for details that are out of place.
- Keep your transitions smooth: Use transition words to keep your paragraph flowing well. Transitions are useful for many purposes, such as adding thoughts (also, as well as), showing consequences (as a result, therefore), showing similarity and contrast (likewise, instead, but, however), and sequence (first of all, soon, earlier, later on).
- The long and short of it: A nice mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences keeps your writing fresh. Double check your work to make sure that you're using a good amount of each!.
- Same old, same old: Check to see that you aren't starting too many sentences with the same word. This doesn't mean that repetition of a phrase can't be powerful.
- He said, she said: When telling a story to a friend, we usually use the word "said" quite a bit. That is okay, but when we are reading, it helps to vary your writing with other words that may be more specific. Did he "speak," "mumble," or "shriek?" The differences can be quite big!
- Spice it up with describing words: Adjectives and adverbs are modifying words that tell things like how many, what kind, when, and how. Below is a starter list of adjectives and adverbs you can use.
- Adjectives (words that modify nouns or pronouns): adorable, adventurous, beautiful, best, brave, crowded, dangerous, dark, distinct, delightful, elated, frightening, graceful, glorious, healthy, horrible, important, incredible, joyous, kind, large, light, lucky, marvelous, massive, mysterious, nimble, ordinary, outgoing, perfect, pleasant, powerful, precious, quick, quiet, rare, robust, rough, safe, silent, soaring, tense, tremendous, useful, vivacious, vast, witty, zany
- Adverbs (words that usually tell how, when, and where an action takes place): almost, always, anxiously, boldly, briefly, calmly, defiantly, even, far, fast, fondly, gently, gracefully, hastily, justly, less, more, mysteriously, never, often, only, perfectly, politely, rapidly, really, reluctantly, safely, soon, successfully, suddenly, tomorrow, too, truthfully, very, warmly, well, wildly, yearly, yesterday

WRITER'S WORKSHOP – CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions, whether in sentence or paragraph form, have the ability to leave your reader with a lasting feeling after they have finished reading your words. A good conclusion doesn't have to wrap up all loose ends; many wonderful conclusions leave the reader thinking long after the story has concluded.

Depending on the mood of your essay, and what choices you make as the author, there are several tips and techniques you can use when writing your own conclusions. They apply for both conclusion sentences and paragraphs.

- Summaries are for book jackets only: Try not to summarize in your conclusion. Repeating thoughts and information previously stated will force your reader to hurry through the end of your essay, and will make it more difficult for the reader to remember what you said.
- Say “bye-bye” to “This is why”: It is easy to end your paragraph with “This is why...” but a much more effective option is to restate your main idea (from the introduction) in a different way.
- Your conclusion can have several different goals. It can:
 - Challenge the reader to think: Depending on your subject, you may want the reader to walk away from your essay thinking about his or her own life. For example, if you are writing about a time when you questioned your faith, you might want to end your essay by giving your reader a challenge to test his or her own spirituality. Example: “I know I am not the only person who has ever had to fight to keep my faith alive. But I know I am stronger for having done so – hopefully I am not alone.”
 - Put your story in a bigger context: Most likely, there are people out there who can relate to your story. Sometimes it is effective to put your personal story in perspective of a bigger world. For example, “As a middle school student, I know I am not able to drive a car, vote for our president, or see an R-rated movie. Yet. These are my frustrations, but I know eventually, as with everyone who came before me, and everyone who will come after me, I will grow up.”
 - Ask the reader to do something: If you are writing about a cause that is important to you, or a situation that has possible solutions, you can gently urge your reader to act on your message. This puts the reader in a position of power. Example: “The next time you are about to head to the grocery store, try to remember all of the plastic bags you see flying around your neighborhood. Grab a canvas bag instead and make a stylish statement.” Just remember, you aren't here to ridicule, or chastise your reader!