



How to Write Your Own *This I Believe* Essay

We invite you to contribute to the This I Believe project by writing and submitting your own statement of personal belief. We understand how challenging this is, as it requires intense self-examination. Many find it difficult to begin. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggested activities.

1. List three memorable or powerful moments from your life.

Think of moments that might have defined you and helped you understand who you are as a person, how you should live your life, or how you should conduct yourself in the world.

a)

b)

c)

Questions that might help you:

- Did you ever change your mind about something that you were certain about?
- Can you think of someone who has taught you a valuable lesson about life? Can you remember the exact moment when that lesson occurred?
- Did you ever have to confront someone very different from you? If so, what happened? What did you learn?
- What was your “do something” moment – the time you realized you wanted to be more active in changing the world?
- What has been the most challenging or rewarding moment in your life? If it’s something you can share with the rest of the world, tell us about it and tell us what you learned.

2. For each of the three moments above, what belief was strengthened, tested, clarified, or even shattered?

Moment	Belief
<i>(Copy from above)</i>	
a)	a)

b)	b)
c)	c)

3. Take some time to reflect on each of the three moments and beliefs.

Run each one through your mind and think about how you would tell them to a friend. Spend at least 5 to 10 minutes doing this before continuing. You can even make notes if that helps you but you don't have to write each one out just yet.

Then, answer the following questions by circling one of the beliefs.

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| Which belief is the most unusual? | a | b | c |
| Which belief (if any) is the most controversial? | a | b | c |
| Which belief is the most important to you? | a | b | c |
| Which belief has the best story? | a | b | c |
| Which belief's story tells others the most about you? | a | b | c |
| Which belief will serve you best day-to-day? | a | b | c |
| Which belief is the most important to share? | a | b | c |
| Which belief's story will help or inspire others most? | a | b | c |
| Which belief is most important for others to believe as well? | a | b | c |
| Which story do you think others would like to read most? | a | b | c |

4. Pick one belief to write about.

Now that you've thought about each belief and their stories, choose one to be the subject of your essay. You don't have to pick the one with the most circles in step 3. Those questions are simply there to help you think about your beliefs in different ways. You probably know which one is best. Trust your instinct.

5. Summarize your belief in a word, a short phrase, or a sentence.

In as few words as possible, say what your belief is. For example, "Friendship," "Kindness of Strangers," or "Honesty is the best policy." You can even use a metaphor: "The Road Less Traveled." Complete the following sentence...

"I believe... "

6. Write your essay.

Writing is a very personal experience. There really isn't a paragraph-by-paragraph or sentence-by-sentence manual on how to write a *This I Believe* essay. Just write in the best way you know how and follow these general guidelines:

Tell a story: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be *real*. Consider moments when your belief was formed, tested, or changed. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and to the shaping of your beliefs.

Be brief: Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. The shorter length forces you to focus on the belief that is central to your life.

Name your belief: If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief.

Be positive: Say what you *do* believe, not what you *don't* believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

Be personal: Make your essay about you; speak in the first person. 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.

Remember: this worksheet is only a guide. Feel free to discard anything that isn't helpful. Just make sure you can answer the following three questions with "Yes."

Have I told a memorable story clearly and concisely?

Have I shared something personal and important to me?

Is my essay about my own personal philosophy of life?

When you have finished, we encourage you and your students to submit your essays to the This I Believe Essay Collection by visiting the website:

<http://thisibelieve.org/submission/?radioID=51# EssayForm=first>

- or -

<http://bit.ly/nA6k0Y>