

## Getting Started on “This I Believe” Essay Assignment

In this module, you will start planning your project one writing assignment by completing a prewriting assignment. Using the writing process outlined in these modules, you should write your own 400-500 word “This I Believe” essay.

In this essay, you will write about something that you believe. Please use prewriting techniques (later in this module) to come up with an interesting idea, and then use drafting and paragraphing skills to write your essay. Your audience is adults, like yourself, who are interested and curious about new ideas. Pay attention to your audience and the purpose of the writing. Spend time thinking about the organization, the audience, and the purpose of the writing.

You will use MLA format for your writing. If you are unsure of what MLA format is, please look in the Resource folder at the end of the learning modules. Please do not submit a paper that is not in MLA format.

### Other instructions for “This I Believe”

**Tell a story:** Be specific. Consider moments when your 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 essay should be between 400 and 500 words. That’s about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace. It should be 3-5 paragraphs in length.

**Name your belief:** If you can’t name your belief in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list of beliefs, **focus on one core belief.**

**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. (I believe that...)

**Speak to your audience:** Remember, your audience is a group of adults, like you, who have their own beliefs, who are curious and interested in what you believe, and are open to new and different ideas.

**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.

**Avoid writing about religion or other controversial topics:** Since your writing is for a general audience (other adults), try to choose a subject that many people can relate to.

**Avoid writing about what you do not believe:** The topic of this paper is “This I Believe.” Make your paper a positive statement of your beliefs.

## Tips to Add Audience Appeal to Personal Essays

- Be sure your essay is about something you care strongly enough to write about. Readers want to know what you know, feel what you feel, and understand exactly where you're coming from.
- 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 never been to Africa, the effective writer must draw in an audience to show a more universal implication of a very personal experience or belief.
- 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. For more information on how to write a strong introduction, check out these tips: <https://classroom.synonym.com/write-introductory-paragraph-narrative-1790.html>
- Employ all the senses to convey your ideas to the reader: sight, sound, taste, touch, and hearing.
- 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..." 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.