

What DO YOU Think?

In the space in front of each belief statement, write one of the following:

SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree U=Unsure D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

- _____ It is important to always tell the truth.
- _____ Life is fair.
- _____ Words can hurt.
- _____ What goes around comes around.
- _____ Love conquers all.
- _____ People can change.
- _____ An eye for an eye...
- _____ People learn from their mistakes.
- _____ 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.
- _____ Your instincts are always right.
- _____ You should help those that cannot help themselves.

Which statement do you believe in most strongly? Why?

What DO YOU BELIEVE?

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
- a. I've learned that although it's hard to admit it, I'm secretly glad my parents are strict with me. –Age 15
3. I've learned that if someone says something unkind about me, I must live so that no one will believe it. – Age 39
4. I've learned that you can make someone's day by simply sending them a little note. – Age 44
5. 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
6. I've learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life. – Age 58
7. I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. – Age 62
8. I've learned that whenever I decide something with kindness, I usually make the right decision. – Age 66
9. I've learned that it pays to believe in miracles. And to tell the truth, I've seen several. – Age 75
10. I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. – Age 82
11. 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
12. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. – Age 92

What have you learned about life?

I've learned...

On a separate sheet of paper, write 1-2 paragraphs describing how you learned this lesson.

Writing Tips for the Personal Essay

Writing a personal essay requires intense self-examination. Please use these suggestions to help guide your drafting process:

- **Tell a story. Be specific:** Be sure your essay is about something you care strongly enough about to elaborate and write passionately about it. Readers want to know what you know, feel what you feel, and understand exactly where you're coming from. Ground your belief in the events of your life. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed.
- **Connect to your readers:** While the idea for an 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.
- **Use details:** Draw your readers in. 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. Employ all the senses to convey your ideas to the reader: sight, sound, taste, touch, and hearing.
- **Be brief:** Your essay should be between 350 and 500 words.
- **Name your belief:** If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about 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.
- **Be personal:** Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. Upon finishing your draft, read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it to simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.
- **End strong:** 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..." or "In conclusion..." 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.

Check out more example essays at the National Public Radio site:
<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve>

17 Writing Secrets

One author shares his tried-and-true principles for making good writing better.

by Steven Goldsberry

1. Never save your best for last. Start with your best. Expend yourself immediately, then see what happens. The better you do at the beginning, the better you continue to do.
2. The opening paragraph, sentence, line, phrase, word, title—the beginning is the most important part of the work. It sets the tone and lets the readers know you're a commanding writer.
3. The first duty of a writer is to entertain. Readers lose interest with exposition and abstract philosophy. They want to be entertained. But they feel cheated if, in the course of entertaining, you haven't taught them something.
4. Show, don't tell or editorialize. "Not ideas about the thing, but the thing itself."—Wallace Stevens
5. Voice is more important than image. "Poetry is not a thing, but a way of saying it."—A.E. Housman
6. Story is more important than anything. Readers (and publishers) care a lot less about craft than content. The question they ask isn't, "How accomplished is the writer?" but, "How good is the story?"
7. These rules, pressed far enough, contradict each other. Such is the nature of rules for art.
8. All writing records conflict. Give the opposition quality attention and good lines. The power of the the antagonists should equal that of the protagonists.
9. Shift focus often. Vary sentence structure and type; jump back and forth in time and place; make a good mix of narration, description, exposition and dialogue.
10. Be careful of your diction. A single word, like a drop of iodine in a gallon of water, can change the color of your entire manuscript.
11. Provide readers with closure. The last sentences of the novel echo something that happened earlier. Life comes full circle. "If I have a pistol in my first chapter, a pistol ends the book."—Ann Rule
12. By the end of the work, the conflict should reach some satisfactory resolution. Not always a "happily ever after" ending, but something should be finalized.
13. Revise, revise. You never get it on the first try. Art shows up in rewriting.
14. Avoid excessive use of adjectives and adverbs; trust the precision of your nouns and verbs. Verb form: the shorter the better. Avoid helping verbs and progressives. Avoid passive voice. Avoid cliché and stock phrases.
15. Be interesting with every sentence. Be brief. Hemingway's first editor at the *Kansas City Star* gave him this style sheet: "Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative." Hemingway later referred to that list as "the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing."
16. If you can be misread, you will be.
17. There are no rules for good writing. Those who break the "rules" successfully are the true artists. But: learn, practice and master the rules first. "You cannot transcend what you do not know."—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

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Peer Revision

Your role as a peer reviewer is to provide suggestions for places that the writer can expand, delete, or otherwise revise. Peers who offer comments only on the superficial elements of an essay (spelling, for example) are doing the writer a disservice. Focus on revision of the writer's content and style; very few of your comments should relate to issues of grammar, punctuation, or spelling.

YOUR ROLE AS A PEER REVIEWER:

- Provide honest -- but supportive -- comments on your classmate's essay.
- Discuss the paper's strengths.
- Identify specific places where the draft is confusing, unclear, or awkward. Don't be timid; writers must be able to give and accept criticism.
- Assess the appropriateness of the writer's tone and style.
- Make suggestions to the writer for how to strengthen the essay's structure, organization, or content. Don't focus on grammar, punctuation, or spelling.

HOW TO PEER REVISE:

- The writer tells the reviewer what s/he would like specific feedback on by jotting a few notes at the top of the essay. The writer will direct his or her reader to look out for areas where the writer is having problems. For example, the writer may be having trouble coming up with realistic dialogue, so she may write at the top of her page -"Please look at my dialogue and offer ideas."
- As you read a student's essay, you should mark both strengths of the essay and unclear/awkward/weak spots on the peer revision worksheet.
- After you have completed your reading and finished your comments on a peer revision sheet, return the essay and the worksheet to the writer. Take time to discuss each essay.
- When you are discussing your essay, push your partner to give you feedback that is useful; ask your partner to re-read paragraphs that are giving you trouble, direct them to the questions listed below, or find other ways to prompt more thorough critiques.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

After reading and completing a peer revision sheet, use some of these questions to help you discuss with your partner his or her work.

1. Is the belief interesting/unique? Why or why not?
2. Does the writer illustrate his or her belief with a story? Is the story realistic and believable? Why or why not?
3. Does he or she use concrete imagery and sensory details to describe the details of the story?
4. Which sections are most effective? What accounts for their effectiveness?
5. Which sections are weakest? How could these areas be strengthened?
6. What are the most descriptive sections of the story?
7. What ideas can be eliminated?

MENTOR TEXTS

A mentor text is a piece of writing that writers use to learn more about some aspect of the writing process or craft. A mentor text inspires us to write, to revise, to publish. We will be using mentor texts as models for our own writing. Search out a mentor text for this first Writer's Notebook assignment. You will need to find a published model for the type of writing you are doing. Since our purpose in putting together this piece is to present it to an actual audience, think about where you would potentially like to submit your work for publication. Likely, you will find models for your writing when you begin to narrow down where you would like to submit your piece for publication. And once you've found your mentor text, complete the form below.

TITLE OF TEXT:	AUTHOR OF TEXT:
PUBLICATION INFORMATION FOR WHERE YOU FOUND THE PIECE:	TYPE OF PUBLICATION (printed anthology, type of website, etc.):
WHAT TO ANALYZE	YOUR ANALYSIS
<p>Who is the SPEAKER?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is the speaker? Identification of the person (or group of people) that wrote this text: what is the speaker's age, gender, class, or education? Identify the main voice within the text. What can you tell or what do you know about this person's role in the text? 	
<p>What is the OCCASION?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the time and place of the text. What is the current situation? Is it a personal event, a celebration, an observation, a critique, or...? Identify the context of the text. 	
<p>Who is the AUDIENCE?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The readers to whom this text is directed. The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group. Does the speaker specify an audience? What assumptions exist in the text about the intended audience of this text? 	
<p>What is the PURPOSE?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the purpose for the passage/text? What is the message? Why did the author write it? What is the author's goal? How does the speaker convey the message? 	
<p>What is the SUBJECT?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The topic, content, and ideas included in the text. Can you identify and state the subject in a few words? Is there one or more than one subject? How does the author present the subject? Does s/he introduce it immediately or not? Is the subject explicit or implicit? 	
<p>What WORKS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the piece organized well? If so, how is it organized? How does the writer capture the reader's attention? Interesting word choice? Variety of sentence structures? Surprising observations? What is it about this piece that you would like to incorporate into your own writing? 	

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Before declaring your writing process complete, it is important to understand the characteristics of your intended audience. This will help you select the best style, format, and information/arguments to include in your writing. Having knowledge of a specific audience allows the writer to understand the social situation in which he or she writes. It allows the writer to come up with a strategy to adapt the writing to best suit an audience. This is important because based on what you find during your audience analysis a writer can adjust his work to relate to an audience in the best way possible. Analyzing your audience helps you select the best words, stories, tone, style, and delivery to use when writing to that specific group of people.

A	Analysis- Who is the audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe your intended audience 	
U	Understanding- What is the audience's knowledge of the subject? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does your audience already know about your subject? What will you need to define or explain for your readers? 	
D	Demographics- What are the groups your audience fits into? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the age of your audience? What is the educational background? What is the gender? What interests connect them? What beliefs connect them? 	
I	Interest- Why are they reading your document?	
E	Environment- Where will this document be sent/viewed?	
N	Needs- What are the audience's needs associated with your document topic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there specific information you need to share? 	
C	Customization- What specific needs/interests should you address relating to the specific audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What will you need to consider when adapting your writing to your audience (examples you use, word choice, format of the writing, etc.)? 	
E	Expectations- What does the audience expect to learn from your document? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The audience should walk away having their initial questions answered and explained. 	

PERSONAL ESSAY RUBRIC

STUDENT _____

SCORE _____

	FOCUS	CONTENT/ DEVELOPMENT	ORGANIZATION	STYLE	CONVENTIONS
4	Establishes and maintains a sharp, distinct focus on a personal belief. The essay incorporates a thought-provoking belief, a position on that belief, and sound reason(s) to support that belief. The thesis clearly addresses the prompt and reveals a strong understanding of the task and audience.	Fully supports the thesis/belief with well-developed body paragraphs. Each body paragraph focuses on one main idea that is fully developed using specific examples and details. Appropriately and skillfully incorporates relevant examples, elaborations, explanations, descriptions, definitions, and/or quotations. The examples and details illuminate the belief. The details draw the reader into the author's experience.	Introduction starts in an interesting way that draws the reader in (hook). The introduction clearly identifies a core belief (thesis). Each body paragraph fully develops a main idea using detail sentences that support the thesis. The essay uses transition sentences to flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next. Conclusion reiterates the belief (thesis), takes the thesis one step further, and ends with a strong clincher.	Purposefully uses a variety of mature sentence structures, rich vocabulary, colorful verbs, descriptive language, first person pronouns, and active voice to establish the reflective tone required for a personal essay. The effective writer must draw in an audience to show a more universal implication of a very personal experience or belief.	Thorough control of sentence formation. Few errors, if any, are present in grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation, but the errors that are present do not interfere with meaning.
3	Clearly identifiable belief. Further development of topic, position, and/or reason(s) would strengthen the belief/thesis. Thesis adequately addresses the prompt and reveals a general understanding of the task and audience.	Body paragraphs adequately support the thesis/belief but could be more fully developed. Stronger and/or more specific examples, elaborations, explanations, descriptions, definitions, and/or quotations are necessary to fully support the thesis.	Introduction includes a hook statement and thesis statement. Each body paragraph adequately develops a main idea using detail sentences that support the thesis. Conclusion reiterates the thesis, takes the thesis one step further, and ends with a strong clincher. Transitions between paragraphs could be strengthened to help with flow.	Uses a variety of sentence structures, action verbs, descriptive language, first person pronouns, and active voice throughout the essay. Diction and tone are somewhat stiff for a reflective personal essay.	Adequate control of sentence formation. Some errors may be present in grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation, but few, if any, of the errors that are present may interfere with meaning.
2	The belief is vague and is not clearly defined. Focus is not maintained throughout the essay. The lack of a clear belief reveals a limited understanding of task and audience.	Body paragraphs weakly support the thesis/belief due to the use of vague and/or unrelated examples, elaborations, explanations, abstract clichés, descriptions, definitions, and/or quotations.	Introduction paragraph, body paragraphs, and conclusion paragraphs are present, but lack one or more required components. Transitions between paragraphs are limited.	Uses some simplistic and/or awkward sentence structures, imprecise language, passive voice, and uses second or third person pronouns.	Limited and/or inconsistent control of sentence formation. Some sentences may be awkward or fragmented. Many errors may be present in grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation and some of those errors may interfere with meaning.
1	No obvious belief is present. Displays a lack of understanding of the task and audience.	Body paragraphs do not effectively develop a thesis or main idea. Uses minimal, vague, and/or unrelated examples, elaborations, explanations, descriptions, definitions, and/or quotations.	Weak organization of paragraphs and ineffective transitions may inhibit reader understanding.	Awkward sentence structures and/or imprecise language may inhibit reader understanding. Use of passive voice, second or third person pronouns, and abstract clichés establishes an unreflective tone inappropriate for a personal essay.	Minimal control of sentence formation. Many sentences are awkward and fragmented. Many errors may be present in grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation, and many of those errors may interfere with meaning.

NON-SCORABLE	OFF-PROMPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is illegible, i.e., includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response Is incoherent, i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense Is insufficient, i.e., does not include enough to assess domains adequately Is a blank paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is readable but did not respond to prompt

This I Believe Presentation



Public Speaking Tips:

Your VERBAL Delivery:

You'll want to work toward presenting your speech in a conversational style. The audience wants you to talk *to* them not *at* them. Use a sincere tone that lets the audience know you're invested in the speech you are presenting.

- Incorporate pauses to highlight key ideas, transition between points, and/or grab the audience's attention again.
- Think about the volume of your voice – can the person in the back hear you clearly? Keep in mind, working without a microphone may make it necessary for you to modify your volume.
- Pay special attention to the rate of speech you're using; remember the goal isn't to finish as soon as possible. You want to make sure that the audience is understanding your speech and connecting with it. The rate you use should allow you to focus on explaining your belief carefully.
- Your rate, volume, and inflection are also called **prosody**. Having variety in your rate, volume, and inflection can help give emphasis to the speech and will help you sustain the audience's interest. Be especially conscious of these vocal delivery features when giving examples or sharing an illustration or story.

Your NON-VERBAL Delivery:

Eye contact is crucial in keeping you and the audience connected. The audience forms understanding and makes judgments about your material based on their ability to see your eyes. You can see if you are making sense to the audience by looking at them and gauging their non-verbal feedback.

- Anxiety can cause a speaker to see an audience as a menacing big blur rather than a gathering of interested individuals. This is why it is important to get your anxiety in check before beginning your speech.
- To help you connect on a person-to-person level, locate the friendly faces in the audience—the people who give positive feedback in the form of smiles, nods, and attentive listening positions. Speak directly to these people, varying your eye contact with them. You'll begin to notice more and more “friendly” faces to connect with as the audience is drawn into your speech.

Gestures and stance should appear natural. They should add purpose and emphasis to the message. It is best to use gestures unconsciously so that you avoid drawing attention to them, but if nervous energy tends to make you freeze physically, then you may need to plan a few gestures until you become more comfortable.

- It's better to have minimal gestures than distracting or overdone gestures.
- Minimize distracting habits like fidgeting or swaying.
- To help channel this nervous energy, think about incorporating purposeful movement. Not only will this use some of the energy, it will also help to emphasize main points and keep the audience engaged.

SOURCE:

Stageil, Amy, et. al. "Public Speaking Tips: General Advice for Verbal and Nonverbal Skill Development." [The Center for Food Security and Public Health](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/TrainTheTrainer/pdfs/GeneralPs.pdf). 2004-2006. Iowa State University. 21 September 2007 <<http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/TrainTheTrainer/pdfs/GeneralPs.pdf>>.

This i Believe Video Critique

Give yourself a number grade in each area. In each box, write a 2-3 sentence explanation of what you did well and where you need to improve.

5=Exceptional 4=Well Done 3=Average/Basic 2=Needs Improvement

Criteria and Explanation	Rating
<p>BEFORE VIEWING YOUR TAPE: Think about your preparation</p> <p>PREPARATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You spent time reviewing the content of your essay. You worked on making sure your introduction began in a unique way, your thesis clarified a belief, your details illustrated that belief, your transitions aided in understanding, and your ending was strong. You added details to your essay. You skillfully incorporated relevant examples, elaborations, explanations, and descriptions. The examples and details illuminated your belief. You printed out a double spaced copy of your speech in large font and marked your speech to remind yourself where to pause and stress ideas. You practiced your speech out loud multiple times, paying attention to your phrasing, use of voice, eye contact, and body movements. <p>STRENGTHS/AREAS TO IMPROVE:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<p>DURING YOUR SPEECH: Reflect on your performance</p> <p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–ELOQUATION: the presenter's use of language and his or her voice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You made sure you used clear and precise words to suit your subject Your speech used a rich vocabulary You avoided clichés and redundancies You did not rush through your speech. Your speech was understandable, audible, and articulate You appropriately varied your pitch to avoid a monotone speaking style You adjusted your stress, volume, and inflection to provide emphasis to ideas or to influence the audience <p>STRENGTHS/AREAS TO IMPROVE:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
<p>FOLLOWING YOUR SPEECH: Watch your speech on fast forward</p> <p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–NON-VERBAL: the presenter's eye contact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You maintained eye contact throughout most of presentation (you are not bobbing your head a lot to read your speech and quickly look up) You did not rely heavily of reading from note cards or text You spread your eye contact throughout the audience <p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–NON-VERBAL: the presenter's body movement/gestures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You appear relaxed, confident, and poised (you stand tall and do not cross and uncross your legs or rock back and forth) You do not lean or slouch on podium, desk, or wall You use your hands and body movements to emphasize statements (you do not grip the podium or have your hands in your pockets) <p>STRENGTHS/AREAS TO IMPROVE:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

This i Believe

10=Exceptional 8=Well Done 6=Average/Basic 4=Needs Improvement

Grading Criteria and Explanation	Rating/ Comment
<p>CONTENT: the information included in the presentation and ideas expressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes a clear thesis statement that identifies a unique personal belief • original/unique presentation style; belief and supporting details capture the audience's attention • appropriately and skillfully incorporates relevant examples, elaborations, explanations, and descriptions. The examples and details illuminate the belief • the details draw the reader into the author's experience • obvious time and effort went into revising the text of the speech before it was presented 	
<p>ORGANIZATION: the way the parts of the presentation fit together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and interesting introduction that captures the audience's attention • the speech is easy to follow because it is logically presented; obvious structure • smooth transitions between ideas • the speech has obviously been practiced • the speech is organized to help the audience remember important ideas and concepts (reinforces and uses repetition at key points) • effective conclusion both sums up the speaker's belief and leaves listeners with strong, concise statement 	
<p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–ELOQUATION: the presenter's use of language and his or her voice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and precise word choice, suited to subject • rich vocabulary • avoids clichés and redundancies • appropriate rate (not rushed) • understandable, audible, articulate • appropriate, varied pitch (avoid a monotone speaking style) • stress and volume appropriate • adjust stress, volume and inflection to provide emphasis to ideas or to influence the audience 	
<p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–NON-VERBAL: the presenter's eye contact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintained throughout most of presentation • did not rely heavily of reading from note cards or text • spread throughout the audience 	
<p>PUBLIC SPEAKING–NON-VERBAL: the presenter's body movement/gestures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appears relaxed, confident, poised • did not lean or slouch on podium, desk, or wall • hands and body are used appropriately to emphasize statements 	
<p>OVERALL COMMENTS:</p>	<p>TOTAL: /50</p>