

WRITING THE ESSAY DRAFT – *This I Believe*

Specs: Turn your credo into an essay of 500-600 words. Double Space.

Due for in-class workshop: see syllabus

You have your very short credo written, and now you have heard it spoken into the air with an audience.

The next step is to move that statement to the *This I Believe* essay that you will be recording and posting on the web.

“The credo assignment that I turned in as a precursor to the This I Believe essay turned out almost exactly how I wanted it to. However, I had some trouble fleshing out my core belief into something tangible that a reader could identify with.

“The main struggle that I faced in building up my belief was in transforming it from a more poetic, subjective idea into something objective and supportable. My credo was based on creating a feeling in a poetic style based largely on imagery and mood. My essay, on the other hand, needed to be built around a more specific example of what I was trying to get at while at the same time retaining the mood that I wanted. It was difficult to get in a vivid description of the image I had in my mind and set the mood and keep the whole thing under the 500-word limit.”

Audience Awareness

Careful consideration of the writer’s audience has always been important to the creation of effective discourse. How well does the writer know the audience? What bonds already exist between writer and reader? How can the writer demonstrate credibility, authority, and trustworthiness with a given audience? Such questions must be taken into account in each writing situation and can even be generative when beginning to form ideas and plan an essay.

The *This I Believe* assignment, by virtue of being a text intended for public reading or distribution, has a real audience!

1. Discuss the characteristics of the audience for your *This I Believe* essay. Who will be reading your essay? What are their expectations or needs as readers?
2. Edward R. Murrow’s original series first appeared on national radio before publication in a series of *This I Believe* books translated into several languages. This would have made questions of audience very complex.
 - What effect might the medium—radio or print—have had on the style of these essays?
 - How would you present your ideas differently if they were to first appear in a newspaper, a blog, on the radio, or a podcast?
 - Are some of these audiences public and some private? Imagine your

essay being heard or read in your classroom, a barber shop, coffee shop, or area bookstore. What expectations would each of these audiences have?

3. Discuss how television broadcasters and personalities establish credibility or authority with their audience. How does an author establish trust or interest through a personal essay?
4. How are these audiences and their expectations similar or different than those associated with traditional college essay writing?

From the *This I Believe* Website:

Tell a story about you: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events that have shaped your core values. 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-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 statement should be between 500 and 600 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 one core belief.

Be positive: Write about 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. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Tell a story from your own life; this is not an opinion piece about social ideals. 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.

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 65 years ago.