

## ***Communication Exercise #2—Writing and Speaking a Credo***

Traditionally creeds are communal texts read and repeated in worship to remind the faithful of common beliefs. Religious historian Jaroslav Pelikan describes a moment in the spiritual development of a people—speaking of the Massai of Africa—where they can no longer repeat the prayers and creeds of their teachers but must find their own words for their own context. In many ways, the same is true of college students moving away from family, neighborhood, and hometown and trying to find beliefs and a voice that is truly their own.

For this assignment, compose a personal *credo* that distills your unique approach to life into a short statement of no more than 200 words or shorter. We'll have time to add flesh to this skeleton later, but for now you're simply defining your belief as precisely as possible.

For this exercise to be meaningful, you must make it wholly your own. This short statement isn't all you believe; it's simply a way to introduce others to something(s) you value. In spite of the name, your *credo* need not be religious or even public. You may decide to focus on commitments to family, service, nature, education, political action, or the arts. As you look for a focus, try to choose concrete language and to find something that helps others understand your past, present, and future choices.

***Credo Research Exercise.*** As you begin to articulate your own credo, spend some time reflecting on creeds that have shaped political, social, or religious movements you're interested in. Spend fifteen to twenty minutes researching statements that have galvanized a group of people or shaped a movement.

Would you consider the Preamble to the Constitution or the Communist Manifesto as creeds? Do Amnesty International, Greenpeace, or other campus groups use statements of belief to identify themselves?

Can creeds be negative as well as positive statements, dividing as well as uniting people? In an interview on "The Need for Creeds," Jaroslav Pelikan suggests, "in the darkest hours of life, you've got to believe something specific, and that specification is the task of the creed, because, much as some people may not like it, to believe one thing is also to disbelieve another. To say yes is also to say no." Would you agree that human societies need creeds?

**The Need for Creeds** with Jaroslav Pelikan on NPR

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/need-creeds/211>

**Wikipedia** introduces the creeds of religious, political, and social groups

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creed>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American's\\_Creed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American's_Creed)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scout\\_Promise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scout_Promise)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva\\_vows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva_vows)

**A Note on Credos.** This assignment provides the first, best opportunity to discuss and illustrate the real diversity which will be represented by the *This I Believe* essay. And our classroom will be diverse in experience, ideas, religion, everything. Obviously terms like *credo* and *belief* trigger religious associations. But I would like you to articulate your commitments, not through an inherited belief but rather **through lived experience**. We'll want to explore the broader spectrum of beliefs that make up our communities. Here are a few *Credo* openings followed by links to some essays online if you have a mind to explore more.

*I believe in stories. Stories that live and breathe. Stories that are fruitful and multiply. That create stories within stories. Bring into being stories of my own. I want stories that provoke a powerful response be it tears, laughter, or thought. I desire a story to have a gravity of its own. If it's not worth telling more than once, it's not worth telling. It should continue to pull me back again and again . . .*

\* \* \*

*I believe that music is a force that stands and beckons the souls of humans to step out of their secret places. I have seen the power of a guitar's voice as it draws out the souls of strangers in a crowd from under their superficiality and holds them spellbound as one. I have felt an overwhelming sense of unity fall over a huge crowd of people when the insightful artist reveals his sorrow, his frustration, or his overwhelming joy with a melody. I believe in closed eyes and dim lighting, in tapping feet, concert halls, and heads carried up and down by the rolling swells of a melody. . .*

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*I believe in the wisdom of the ages. My happiest place was sitting on my grandmother's counter, while she was cooking, trying to memorize her cornbread recipe. I would sit on her powder blue carpet and run my fingers over the hand stitches of her many old quilts, while the colored glass humming bird feeders on her porch made patches of purple and green move slowly around her living room. Her wisdom slipped by so many, but I drank it in like sunlight. . .*

**Be Cool to the Pizza Dude** by Sarah Adams

<http://www.thisibelieve.org/essay/23>

**Always Go to the Funeral** by Deirdre Sullivan

<http://www.thisibelieve.org/essay/8>

**Leaving Identity Issues to Other Folks** by Phyllis Allen

<http://www.thisibelieve.org/essay/26>

**The Power of Hello** by Howard White

<http://www.thisibelieve.org/essay/48202>

**For next class**, bring this short written credo of your own and be prepared to speak it to the class. No need to memorize. But this is not personal writing (even though it is personal). You are writing for a public audience. We will then grow these into full-fledge larger essays after this stage. Practice reading your credo before class, and strive for a delivery that fits what you are saying.