

Essay I: Inquiry into Self

“This I Believe” Script and Podcast

Length: About 500 words/ audio recording

Rough Draft Due: February 2nd

Follow MLA Conventions*

Final Draft Due: February 4th

*double-spaced with one-inch margins, in Times New Roman, 12 font. See sample paper on D2L.

The best essay topics are an itch you need to scratch.

--Bruce Ballenger

THE ASSIGNMENT

For your first assignment, you'll engage in one of the oldest forms of inquiry—a personal essay, in the form of a script for a podcast. Specifically, you'll compose a “This I Believe” essay and podcast like those broadcast on CBS radio from 1951-1955 and revived on NPR from 2005-2009. The purpose of writing a personal essay is to conduct an inquiry into one's self—asking who you are and why. As the creators of the podcast explain, “This I Believe” encouraged people to reflect on “the core values that guide their daily lives.” The creators also hoped that radio listeners who heard these stories would be prompted to reflect on their own values.

As with all inquiry, you should start your personal essay with a question you don't already know the answer to—what value(s) or beliefs shape your daily life? Where do those values or beliefs come from? What values or beliefs do you want to understand better? Your inquiry should lead you to write not some abstract philosophical statement, but a focused depiction—a story—that illustrates a specific value or belief that helps explain why you live as you do. Keep in mind that the most fruitful inquiries often come from exploring ideas that are surprising, contradictory, and/or paradoxical.

THE PROCESS

Since personal essays—and “This I Believe” podcasts in particular—are well-established genres, we'll **read and listen to sample** “This I Believe” pieces and identify their **genre features**. We'll also complete **invention activities** that can help you find a subject worthy of further exploration. **Early drafts** will involve generating material and choosing a focus. **Peer and teacher response** will help you **revise** to make clearer the **connection between your experience and your value or belief**, to **organize your essay to make it compelling** for your audience and to ensure that you've **provided adequate, engaging evidence** to support your claims. Finally, you'll **edit and proofread**.

In writing your essay, please follow the guidelines for the original “This I Believe” project found here: <http://thisibelieve.org/guidelines/>. **The final draft should be no more than 500 words**. While writing a short narrative about yourself may seem easy, the challenge will be to convey the significance of your subject through a narrow focus and selective detail. Remember: you are inquiring into yourself and your beliefs.

In conjunction with this essay, **you'll also make an audio recording of your narrative** and submit the text (script) and audio versions in your portfolio. **In your final author's note, you'll reflect on how hearing your essay affected how you revised and edited** (*i.e.*: what did hearing it aloud help you understand about what the essay is trying to say and how well it is saying it?).

Course outcomes met:

- ❖ *Write in a range of genres, using appropriate rhetorical conventions*
- ❖ *Demonstrate the ability to employ flexible strategies for generating and revising your writing (such as: invention, drafting, revising, recording, and editing)*