

NPR's *This I Believe*

Essay-Writing Guidelines

Essay Submission Guidelines

When you write your essay, NPR encourages you to:

- Please limit your essay to fewer than 500 words.
- Describe an event that shaped your beliefs or a person who inspired them.
- Tell us what you *do* believe, not what you don't believe.

To guide you through the process, NPR offers these suggestions:

- **Be brief:** Your statement should be between 350 and 500 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, because three minutes is a very short time.
- **Be positive:** Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us 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. 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.

**To guide you through the process,
NPR offers these suggestions:**

- **Tell a story:** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. 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.