Student Name: Date:

**This I Believe Essay Guidelines**

It’s now time to begin the writing process. Your finished essay should be between 350-500 words and should be written in three paragraphs: introduction, details, conclusion. Here are some tips to consider as you write:

1. **It’s all about you…** Write about you and your thoughts. Tell your story in first person (I, me) and try to avoid sentences like, “We feel this way.”
2. **Keep it personal…** Don’t try to use words or phrases you wouldn’t normally say. Remember, if you wouldn’t be comfortable saying the words out loud, it is probably too formal.
3. **Say what you DO believe**… not what you DON’T. Write about what you think, but not at the expense of others. Keep the focus on you, and what you believe, not what you disagree with.

**Guide to Writing an Essay**

One way to think about writing an essay is to envision a house. A house cannot exist without a foundation and a roof – regardless of what is inside the house, those two features are all-important. What exists inside the house, on the other hand, is what makes it unique.

Likewise, essays need an introduction and conclusion to anchor them together. The details in the middle make the paragraph special.

The introduction is like a sneak preview of a movie. It gives the reader an idea of what to expect in the essay, but doesn’t reveal everything. The introduction must mention the main idea of the essay, or the “Big Picture” and engage the reader in some way.

Juicy details, or the body of an essay, provide the most interest for your writing. These details “prove” the statements made in your introduction.

The conclusion comes back to the main idea, but says it in a different way than the introduction. Conclusions aim to wrap up the paragraph, but try to avoid saying, “this is why…” or “that is why…”

Here is a basic outline for writing an essay:

1. Introduction
2. Body Paragraph(s)
3. Conclusion

*Tips for Writing an Introduction Paragraph*

1. Don’t wait too long to get into the actual story. If you set up your essay with a quote or unusual fact, make sure you quickly get to the main idea.
2. Rhetorical questions are questions that don’t really have answers. They are posed in an essay, often in the beginning, to get the reader thinking of a certain topic. Rhetorical questions can be quite effective, but be careful not to overuse them. One or two rhetorical questions can go a long way in terms of effectiveness, but more than that will be overkill. Example: “Have you ever had to trust someone with a secret?”
3. Don’t worry too much about length here. Sometimes a good two-to-three sentence introduction can say all that you need to say.
4. Use action: An active voice with strong verbs will grab your reader’s attention. Instead of starting out explaining what your essay will be about, tell the reader. Example: Instead of “This is my story about the day I learned my parents loved me unconditionally,” say, “My heart soared as I came to a conclusion about the most important value of all: love.”

*Tips for Writing Body Paragraphs/Juicy Details*

1. Stay on track: Don’t let enthusiasm become a runaway train. Keep your details moving in progressive order, and re-read all work to check for details that are out of place.
2. Keep your transitions smooth: Use transition words to keep paragraphs flowing well. Transitions are useful for many purposes, such as adding thoughts (also, as well as), showing consequences (as a result, therefore), sowing similarity and contrast (likewise, instead, but, however), and sequence (first of all, soon, earlier, later on).
3. The long and short of it: A nice mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences keeps your writing fresh. Double check your work to make sure that you’re using a good amount of each!
4. Same old, same old: Check to see that you aren’t starting too many sentences with the same word. This doesn’t mean repetition of a phrase can’t be powerful.
5. He said, she said: When telling a story to a friend, we usually use the word “said” quite a bit. That is okay, but when we are reading, it helps to vary your writing with other words that may be more specific. Did he “speak,” “mumble,” or “shriek?” The differences can be quite big.
6. Spice it up with describing words: Adjectives and adverbs are modifying words that tell things like how many, what kind, when, and how.

*Tips for Writing a Conclusion*

1. Summaries are for book jackets only: Try not to summarize in your conclusion. Repeating thoughts and information previously stated will force your reader to hurry through the end of your essay, and will make it more difficult for the reader to remember what you said.
2. Say “bye-bye” to “this is why”: It is easy to end with “this is why…” but a much more effective option is to restate your main idea (from the introduction) in a different way.
3. Your conclusion can have several different goals:
   1. Challenge the reader to think
   2. Put your story into bigger context.
   3. Ask the reader to do something.

**Guide to Writing a Paragraph**

Writing a paragraph is, in many ways, like writing a mini-essay. A paragraph should be written in three basic parts: an introduction, juicy details, and a conclusion. (sound familiar?) The introduction or topic sentence tells what the paragraph will be about, the juicy details come in the middle, and the conclusion comes back to the paragraph’s main idea.

Like the house analogy used for writing an essay, consider writing a paragraph similar to a hamburger. The introduction and conclusion sentences serve as the top and bottom part of the burger: the bun. Some buns may have sesame seeds, some may be plain, but, essentially, the goal is the same: to hold the burger together. It’s what is in between the bun that is what makes a burger interesting, just as the details of a paragraph are what make the paragraph worth reading. And, like a good burger, the juicy the details, the better the final product.

*Tips for Writing an Introduction/Topic Sentence*

1. Ask a questions that gets to the point of your paragraph: “When was the last time you saw someone do the right thing?”
2. Make a list: “The next time you go to a museum, make sure you have the right clothes, supplies, and fellow travelers with you!” In this case, each of these list items would be turned into a separate detail sentence.
3. Share a story: “I will never forget the last time I had to make a difficult choice.” You would then go on to explain what happened.
4. Use a quote related to your topic. There are wonderful websites online that provide thousands of quote for you to use. Make sure you credit the original author.

*Tips for Writing Body Paragraphs/Juicy Details*

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