

**Expository Writing: Social and Ethical Issues: Essay #1 Sequence****Personal Essay: Reasons To Believe: Reflections on Ethical Commitment and Social Awareness**

**Due Dates:** Pre-Essay Exercise: Monday., 9/12 (4 copies-in class)

First Version: Friday, 9/23 by noon (by email)

Workshop: Monday, 9/26

Revision: Friday, 10/7 (two copies to office with new cover letter)

Please deliver or **email** the **first version** of your essay (as a Word document) to me with a cover letter describing what you see as the strengths and problem areas of the piece. If you are developing the piece from Ex.1, include the marked-up version of the exercise. When you submit your revision, please include **two** copies of the new version, together with the marked-up first version with my comments and a new cover letter describing your changes in revision and your overall sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the new version.

**ESSAY #1 (Suggested length: 5 pgs., typed, double-spaced)****Introduction/Context for Writing:**

We begin the course by reflecting on the most important sources of our personal beliefs and ethical commitments. Individuals often trace the roots of their ethical or social consciousness or particular beliefs to different (and interrelated kinds) of influences. Some people emphasize the power of individual role models--family members, peers, teachers, or religious, community and political leaders. Others attribute their ethical awakening to specific personal experiences of injustice or exposure to social movements, while still others stress the transformative influence of books, films, lectures or religious traditions. While some individuals can identify a moment of "epiphany" in their moral development, many others trace the evolution of their ethical consciousness to a variety of different influences over time.

**Essay Assignment:**

In this essay, you will have the opportunity to reflect upon **one or two** key influences on your own moral and ethical development or social consciousness. The influence(s) may be person(s), experience(s), event(s), or print or visual text(s) (e.g., articles, books, poems, films, photographs). As you create your narrative, be richly descriptive in your prose. Take the reader inside the experience(s) so that he or she can appreciate the power of this influence. If you are focusing on an individual, for example, describe the person physically and use dialogue, if appropriate. Alternately, if you are writing about a film, book or political speech, select visual images, scenes, quotations or excerpts that will communicate the power of the text(s).

For this assignment, some students choose to write about the development of a more general social consciousness (as Marian Wright Edelman does in “A Family Legacy”), while others opt to focus on their experiences of becoming aware of a specific social problem such as racial or gender equality, environmental justice, genocide or animal rights.

In the revised version, you will be asked to incorporate two outside sources. In class, we will review the use of outside sources in personal narrative.

## **Writing Ideas**

If you are considering a service-learning commitment this term or have previously done volunteer work, this assignment can enable you to narrate the “backstory” of how you decided to work on a particular community issue. If you have a strongly held position on a particular issue (e.g. for or against capital punishment, human cloning, abortion rights or gay marriage), this essay offers you the opportunity to trace the roots of that position.

## **Writing Challenges for This Assignment:**

### **A. Crafting a Reflective Essay:**

Our focus in the course is to create clear, vivid and well-supported essays as “public scholarship” for a broad community of readers. The challenge in this essay is to move beyond “purely personal” narrative or unprocessed experience. When writers engage in personal narrative for a public readership, they are reflecting upon, shaping and framing their own experience so that the essay connects with a wider audience. As you craft your essay, think about motive. Why do you want to narrate this story – to inspire readers, to challenge their preconceptions, to motivate them to care about an issue or, more generally, social justice (however you may define the term)? Successful personal essays create a bridge between the personal and the public. Essays like this can inspire readers to ponder the sources of their own beliefs, recognize different pathways to social engagement and question their preconceptions about particular kinds of issues.

### **B. Questions of Argument and Structure**

Although this essay deals with the realm of personal life, you are still making an argument, i.e., supporting a claim with evidence. For example, you may be supporting a claim that a particular individual or experience was “life-changing” or “highly influential” by presenting examples of the power of that experience in a clear, reflective and well-structured format. Remember: “argument” can take many forms!

### **C. Voice and Style:**

In essays like this, you can often be more colloquial or conversational than in more formal academic prose. However, be sure that your language expresses the power of the experience(s) that you have chosen to narrate. Consider your use of symbol and metaphor. Vary the length of your sentences.

**Exercise 1** (One and one-half to two ½ pages: Bring FOUR copies to class on Monday, 9/12):

Write a vivid description of a central influence upon your own sense of morality or social consciousness. After this description, write a paragraph describing why this experience would be relevant to a readership. If you were to write essay #1 about this experience, what do you hope readers would take away from your piece? Are there particular kinds of readers you are trying to reach?