

# WRITING A GEORGIA LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY

## Pointers for Students

- A *Law of Life* is a wise saying or quote that contains words of truth, lasting meaning, or inspiration. Examples of *Laws of Life* include:
  - “An attitude of gratitude creates blessings.”
  - “You are only as good as your word.”
  - “To have a friend, be one.”
  - “Honesty is the best policy.”
  - “When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.”
  - “Smile and the world smiles with you.”
- Think about a personal experience that has taught you about a Law of Life. The experience may have been a major event in your life, or it may have been a small, private moment when you came to understand something profound about life. Perhaps the experience was something traumatic, such as when you or a family member were in a car wreck. Or perhaps the experience was something that makes you smile every time you think of it – the time your grandmother taught you how to bake a blueberry pie, or the time that you and a friend discovered that laughter was the best medicine.
- Write an essay that relates your experience to a Law of Life. But sure to clearly state the Law of Life in your essay!
  - Remember that the best essays include lots of details. These details make the reader feel as though he or she was right there with you when the event occurred. Let the reader know exactly how you felt, and why.
- Your essay should be between 500 and 700 words (1½ to 2 pages typed and double-spaced). Essays that are shorter or longer than this will be disqualified from the contest. You may put a word count at the beginning or end of your essay if you wish, but it is not required.
- Complete the Student Entry Form and staple it to the top of your essay.
- Make a copy of your essay to keep; the copy that is sent to the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest will not be returned to you.

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*“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.” -William Wordsworth*

- Remind students that many prize-winning essays have been written by students who first thought they had nothing to write about. Stress that prize-winning essays come from students of all abilities and grades, and participants do not have to be a poet laureate in order to be a winner.
- Clearly explain the meaning behind the phrase *Laws of Life*.

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Consider the following questions:

- What three qualities do you value in a friend, a teacher, or a parent?
  - Describe an incident or an event from which you learned a lesson “the hard way.”
  - Describe an event in which you went out of your way to help someone.
  - Describe a situation in which someone went out of their way to help you.
  - Do you have a parent, grandparent or teacher who often says a quote such as “A penny saved is a penny earned?” or “Anything worth doing is worth doing well?” What does that person say?
  - When you become a parent, what are the three most important values that you hope your children will have?
- The *Laws of Life* essay should be about a personal experience. It might be about something traumatic or serious (a car wreck, a parents’ divorce, a move from another state or country), or an ordinary event which gave a student a special insight into the meaning of life (an afternoon football game, a ride on a bus, or a heart-to-heart talk with a friend).
  - If you have written a *Laws of Life* essay in the past, look at this year’s essay in a new light: If you wrote about a sad and difficult life experience for last year’s essay, you may want to write about something more light-hearted this year. Or if last year’s essay was about an event that still has a repercussion in your life, “dig deeper” and revisit the experience again – you may be surprised by new insights and new meanings.
  - Remember that each Law of Life Essay should:
    - 1) include a Law of Life or maxim
    - 2) relate to a student’s personal experience
    - 3) be 500 to 700 words (approximately 1 ½ to 2 pages typed doubles-spaced using Times New Roman 12 point font)
    - 4) have a completed Student Entry Form stapled on top of the essay
      - The student’s name should not be written on the essay itself.

## **Georgia Laws of Life Sample Maxims**

1. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. – *William Hickson*
2. The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything. – *Edward Phelps*
3. Honesty is the best policy. –*Anonymous*
4. No one knows what he can do until he tries. –*Pubilius Syrus*
5. Mistakes are doorways to discovery. – *Anonymous*
6. Man is what he believes. – *Anton Chekhov*

7. It is better to love than to be loved. –*Anonymous*
8. To listen, when nobody else wants to listen, is a very beautiful thing. –*Mother Teresa*
9. A soft answer turneth away wrath. –*Proverbs*
10. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. –*Proverbs*
11. They're only truly great who are truly good. –*George Chapman*
12. Little things affect little minds. –*Benjamin Disraeli*
13. Too often we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. –*John F. Kennedy*
14. The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you could become. –*DuBois*
15. One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore. –*Andre Gide*
16. Hold fast to the words of your ancestors. – *Anonymous*
17. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and he'll eat forever. – *Chinese Proverb*
18. Good example is the best sermon. – *Benjamin Franklin*
19. Stop and smell the roses. – *Anonymous*
20. Strangers are just friends waiting to happen. – *Anonymous*
21. Bloom where you're planted. – *Anonymous*
22. Control your emotions or they will control you. – *Chinese Proverb*
23. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the conquest of it. – *William Danforth*

### **Laws of Life Essays Steps for Writing**

**Tip 1: Think about a personal experience that taught you a truth of life.**

This does not need to be an earth-shattering event—but it should be an event that taught you something – a truth or lesson which you have continued to live by.

**Tip 2: Get specific**

The best essays describe one specific situation that was a turning point in the individual's thinking.

**Specifics you should include:**

**Details** you remember vividly – smells, sights, sounds, tastes, and feelings.

**Tip 3: Find a maxim**

Choose a saying that immediately rings true for you. Choose one that is the logical lesson from the life event you discuss. You can search for an appropriate maxim based on the topic of your life lesson ... *Honesty, faith, charity, etc.*

**What is a maxim?**

- A maxim is a wise or “pithy” saying that contains words of truth or lasting meaning.
- Certain sayings you will read just make great sense to you immediately – and this is the sort of maxim you want.

**Choosing a maxim**

- Some maxims deal with **love** and **friendship**:

- “It is better to love than be loved.” --*St. Francis*
- “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” --*Matthew 19:19 (The Golden Rule)*
- “Love conquers all things.” --*Virgil*

**Some Maxims deal with DETERMINATION and PERSISTENCE**

- “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” --*William Hickson*
- “By asserting our will, many a closed door will open before us.” --*Seyyed Hossein Nasr*
- “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” --*Benjamin Franklin*
- “It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.” --*Motto of the Christophers*
- “What the mind can conceive, it can achieve.” --*Anonymous*

**Other Maxims discuss COURAGE and INTEGRITY**

- “I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.” --*Booker T. Washington*
- “You cannot discover new oceans until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.” ---  
----*Anonymous*
- “You are either part of the problem or part of the solution.” --*Eldridge Cleaver*

**Find the Right Maxim:**

- Your teacher will give you a handout with maxims on it
- Research and find more maxims on these web sites: [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com)  
[www.quotegeek.com](http://www.quotegeek.com)      [www.quoteland.com](http://www.quoteland.com)      [www.wiseoldsayings.com](http://www.wiseoldsayings.com)

**Other sources for Maxims:** Bartlett’s Book of Familiar Quotations, Chicken Soup book series, Aesop’s Fables

**Try also thinking of** – \* Grandparents’ maxims or favorite sayings; \* Favorite stories, proverbs, Bible parables, or sermons

**Checklist for *Laws of Life* Essay**

- Based on a **personal experience**
- Contains **details of the event** – sights, sounds, tastes, touches, smells
- Includes a **maxim**
- About **500 words** – or 1 ½ pages typed, double-spaced
- **Cover sheet** has parent signature and all other information completed

## Character Traits

Characters (and real-life people) have unique attributes called traits.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Honesty</li><li>• Light-heartedness</li><li>• Leadership</li><li>• Expertness</li><li>• Bravery</li><li>• Conceitedness</li><li>• Mischievousness</li><li>• Demanding</li><li>• Thoughtful</li><li>• Keen</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bright</li><li>• Courageous</li><li>• Serious</li><li>• Funny</li><li>• Humorous</li><li>• Sad</li><li>• Poor</li><li>• Rich</li><li>• Tall</li><li>• Dark</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Humble</li><li>• Friendly</li><li>• Short</li><li>• Adventurous</li><li>• Hard-working</li><li>• Timid</li><li>• Shy</li><li>• Bold</li><li>• Daring</li><li>• Dainty</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Happy</li><li>• Disagreeable</li><li>• Simplicity</li><li>• Simpleness</li><li>• Fancy</li><li>• Plain</li><li>• Excited</li><li>• Studious</li><li>• Inventive</li><li>• Creative</li><li>• Thrilling</li><li>• Independent</li><li>• Intelligent</li><li>• Compassionate</li><li>• Gentleness</li><li>• Pride</li><li>• Wild</li><li>• Messy</li><li>• Neat</li><li>• Joyful</li><li>• Strong</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Light</li><li>• Handsome</li><li>• Pretty</li><li>• Ugly</li><li>• Selfish</li><li>• Unselfish</li><li>• Self-confident</li><li>• Respectful</li><li>• Considerate</li><li>• Imaginative</li><li>• Busy</li><li>• Patriotic</li><li>• Fun-loving</li><li>• Popular</li><li>• Successful</li><li>• Responsible</li><li>• Lazy</li><li>• Dreamer</li><li>• Helpful</li><li>• Simple-minded</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pitiful</li><li>• Cooperative</li><li>• Lovable</li><li>• Prim</li><li>• Proper</li><li>• Ambitious</li><li>• Able</li><li>• Quiet</li><li>• Curious</li><li>• Reserved</li><li>• Pleasing</li><li>• Bossy</li><li>• Witty</li><li>• Fighter</li><li>• Tireless</li><li>• Energetic</li><li>• Cheerful</li><li>• Smart</li><li>• Impulsive</li><li>• Loyal</li></ul>

## **SAMPLE FORMAT PAPER**

Maxim: Even a mistake may turn out to be the one thing necessary to a worthwhile achievement.

*~Henry Ford, 1863-1947 American Car Manufacturer*

Character Trait: Perseverance

### Learning from your Mistakes

The hardest lesson I ever learned was from a huge mistake I made. Learning by making a mistake can be tough unless you are wise enough to realize that mistakes can be considered bumps on the learning curve. I once made a mistake so gigantic I could see no way out. Through the grace of God and some very understanding people, I was able to get to the other side and learn a valuable lesson all at the same time.

**This is an example of how students should format their Laws of Life essays. I hope this makes it clear for everyone.**

- 1) No name or identifying marks on this essay
- 2) All names should only be on the entry application
- 3) Double-space, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1" margins, +/- 500 words
- 4) Maxim and character trait should be listed at the top of the paper. Make sure the maxim is properly credited.
- 5) Essay should be about a personal experience which exemplifies the character trait and the maxim (no boyfriends/girlfriends).
- 6) I hope this helps☺

**Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest  
2011-2012 Student Entry Form**

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY - Attach with a staple to the top of your essay.  
DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE ESSAY ITSELF

High School: \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

Law of Life (This is the maxim or quote that you have written about, and it should appear in your essay):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail (\*Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's or Guardian's Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Have you won this contest as a finalist before? \_\_\_\_\_

First & Last Name of Your English Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

*By signing this document, you and your legal guardian hereby give the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest the right to use this information, your essay, and your photograph and/or video image at its discretion and without limitation to publicize and promote the Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest and/or its sponsors. By signing, you are also certifying that the essay is your own original work and truthfully reflects your personal life experiences.*

Signatures: Essayist: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Students 18 years of age and older do not require a parent's or guardian's signature. If you are 18 or older, please check here: \_\_\_\_\_*