



BBB AKRON

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

TEACHER'S GUIDE

ABOUT THE CONTEST

The Laws of Life Essay Contest invites young people to reflect on and express in their own words the idea and principles that guide them: their philosophy of life. The contest requires students to identify their personal values through a challenging and engaging writing activity.

Unlike other writing contests, judging focuses more on the thought processes and self-awareness of the writer and less on ability. This has allowed special needs and at-risk students to receive recognition for their essays, which is not always possible in typical essay contests.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

The Laws of Life Essay Contest is open to students in grades 9–12 attending schools within the following Ohio counties:

- Ashland
- Medina
- Portage
- Richland
- Summit
- Wayne

HOW TO ENTER

- Download the entry forms on BBB Akron's website.
- Every entry must have the Student Entry Form with a Parent/Guardian signature.
- The top 5% of essays from each classroom/group may be submitted by the teacher/coordinator for judging.

<https://bbb.org/bbb/akron/laws-of-life/>

ENTRY OPTIONS

All entries must be submitted by email to kickes@akronbbb.org or mailed to:

Better Business Bureau
Laws of Life Essay Contest
388 S. Main Street, Suite 302
Akron, OH 44311

IMPORTANT DATES:

Contest Opens: September 1

Submission Deadline: March 13

Winners Notified By: May 31



FAQS

WHAT IS THE PROMPT?

Essays should be about a Law of Life of the student's choosing.

Students can use a theme from the UncommonSense® FRAMEWORK.

IS THERE A SPECIFIC LENGTH?

Essays should be no more than three pages, typed, single-sided and double-spaced. (500 - 1,000 words)

HOW ARE THE ESSAYS JUDGED?

Essays are judged primarily on content. A sample judging rubric is provided on the website.

STUDENT CASH AWARDS

Cash prizes will be awarded for the winning essays. Amounts are indicated below. All student finalists will receive recognition from the BBB as well as a certificate of honor.

We are also proud to announce a major shift in how we reward our participants. We have restructured our awards system so that 100% of our available contest funds will go directly to the students, ensuring their hard work and dedication are rewarded as robustly as possible.

SPECIAL THEME

Each year, BBB Akron selects a Special Character Theme. Students are encouraged, but not required, to write about this theme.

See the website for this year's **SPECIAL THEME**

Essays addressing the Special Character theme will receive one bonus point during judging, and the top essay in this category will receive a \$1,000 award.

STUDENT CASH AWARDS

Cash prizes will be awarded to the top essays:

Best Overall Essay:
\$1,000

Best Special Character Theme Essay:
\$1,000

Runner-Up Awards:
Twelve (12) awards of \$250 each



STUDENT WORKSHEET

USE THIS WORKSHEET TO HELP BRAINSTORM ESSAY IDEAS.

1. Who is someone that you admire? List three qualities that you admire about that person. What law(s) of life does that person demonstrate? How has that person influenced your life?
2. Describe an incident or event from which you learned the lesson “the hard way.”
3. Describe a personal experience that has helped you develop your law(s) of life.
4. What could you change about yourself to become a better person?
5. Describe a time in your life when someone has helped you. How has this affected your law(s) of life?
6. What three qualities do you value in a friend, teacher or parent?
7. Describe a situation in which you went out of your way to help someone else.
8. If you were a parent, what law(s) of life would you teach your children?
9. Has life been good to you? Explain your answer.
10. Name three things for which you are thankful.

*Uncommon***Sense**[®] F R A M E W O R K

FOR LEADERSHIP CHARACTER ETHICS



***UncommonSense*[®] is a framework of ethical characteristics – or “character ethics”- that support effective leadership and positive, flourishing relationships.**

We call them character ethics because they focus on character, not on compliance to a set of rules. Character ethics are self-evident truths that when acted on consistently, produce conscionable behaviors, such as: compassionate acts, honest answers and just decisions.

A growing body of research and literature confirms that the most effective organizational leaders demonstrate “Transformation at the Top.” By this we mean that they strive, by example, to model high character consistently and humbly... although not perfectly.

As a result, these leaders, over time, build pervasive cultures of trust and resulting greatness in their organizations. *UncommonSense* principles guide this change by defining and thus making more simple the transfer of high character behaviors and expectations.

Sadly, this framework is “uncommon” because defined, transferable character-building tools, along with the culture-shaping decisions and conversations they inspire, have been neglected by our K-16 educational and management development institutions.

Fortunately, despite this neglect, character-based leadership makes “sense” because it affirms conscientious qualities such as honesty and integrity. Managers and leaders of conscience will find these common-sense tools valuable as they seek to create and inspire teams that are more productive, innovative, collaborative and effective at problem-solving.

Consistent, conscientious behavior is the foundation for interpersonal trust, sustainable relationships and truly ethical enterprises.

The 20 character ethics of the BBB’s *UncommonSense*[®] are divided into 4 leadership descriptors:

- **Principled & Genuine**
- **Values Others**
- **Seeks Results**
- **Displays Growth**

The framework is most effective when studied with others and when used with the separate *UncommonSense* self-administered personal assessment, available at www.centerforcharacterethics.org.

Persevering as a character-builder is the only thing that is truly 100% within every leader’s personal control. This means there is hope for personal change today that is not dependent on change in others or in our circumstances.

Our conscience drives our convictions, and these convictions drive our conduct, regardless of our past, current circumstances or even cultures or settings that are nonsupportive, cynical or hostile.

PRINCIPLED AND GENUINE

1. SEEKING WISDOM:

High-character people seek something greater than intelligence or knowledge (knowing information); they seek wisdom (knowing what is right and true).

Wisdom requires us to reflect, contemplate and use our conscience before acting. Wisdom also requires humility. You must be teachable. If you are to put these things into practice, you must be willing to take a look at what you thought you knew about yourself and the ideas you hold.

Observable virtues: principled, prudent, contemplative and humble.

Typical examples include:

- People seek to be intellectually honest rather than politically correct.
- People seek to know what is right and true in any situation.
- People desire to be wise, not crafty, clever, or manipulative.
- People verify information rather than accept hearsay or gossip.

2. HONESTY:

High-character people speak the truth with compassion.

Honest people speak up, present the facts with thoughtful accuracy and do so with compassion. They do not avoid communicating critical or disappointing news, but present it accurately and with genuine care for the recipient.

They are clear in their communications to minimize misunderstandings. They do not deliberately mislead or deceive others through misrepresentations, overstatements, partial truths, selective omissions or other intentional, negligent or careless means.

They take responsibility and do not shift blame. To avoid confusing others, honest people avoid habits of sarcasm and cynicism. To avoid angering others, they avoid sanctimonious or condescending tones.

Observable virtues: discreet, discerning and precise.

Typical examples include:

- People are not prone to exaggerate to make a point or make excuses for missing targets.
- Their work, words and representations are accurate.
- People do not lie or mislead by leaving false impressions or selectively communicating.
- People do not give insincere praise, or praise face to face while criticizing behind the back of an individual.
- People make every effort to be accurate in their communications and admit when they are wrong. People honor what has been shared in confidence.

3. INTEGRITY:

High-character people do what they say they will do. In addition to acting consistently with their beliefs, people with integrity do what they say they will do, even when it is inconvenient or difficult. If they are unable to keep their commitments, they inform those affected and take corrective action. They are candid in supplying relevant information.

They do not interpret agreements in an unreasonably technical or legalistic manner to rationalize noncompliance or justify escaping their promises. They resist manipulation and avoid practicing it.

Observable virtues: reliable, consistent, predictable and orderly.

Typical examples include:

- High-character people seek to do the right thing in all situations.
- People do not take the easy way out of assignments. They make every effort to accomplish the task.
- When promises cannot be kept, those affected are informed in advance and corrective action is taken.
- If they say it will be done, you can count on it.

4. TRUSTWORTHINESS:

High-character people are true to their beliefs. They strive to be what they say they are, and their behavior matches their beliefs. They actively self-reflect and know who they are and what they stand for.

Their actions are consistent with their beliefs, and they strive to do “what is right or wise” rather than “what might work or be popular.” They overcome pressures to act in ways that would make them hypocrites.

They seek wisdom first and then consistently apply it to themselves. As a result, they can be trusted within their organizations, marriages, families, fellowships, friendships, teams and other relationships.

Observable virtues: genuine, reflective, self-aware and single-minded.

Typical examples include:

- People hold to their convictions even when there is great pressure to do otherwise.
- People behave consistently regardless of the setting or the audience.
- Because of consistency, people know what to expect of others, especially leaders.

VALUES OTHERS

5. RESPECT:

High-character people treat others as they would want to be treated.

Respectful people take the “Golden Rule” to heart. They understand that although every person is capable of both honorable and dishonorable conduct, the intrinsic worth of others is equal to their own worth.

This conviction makes valuing diverse roles, giftedness, skills, styles, personalities, races, religions and genders logical and compelling. Respect leads diverse people to value the dignity of others while having the liberty to disagree with their opinions.

Observable virtues: inclusive, engaging and honoring.

Typical examples include:

- People treat all others with dignity; there is an absence of prejudice or personal favorites.
- People make others feel important through eye contact and listening for both meaning and understanding.
- People advocate for a strong point of view without crushing another’s innate dignity.
- People encourage others to participate and give them time to develop knowledge and skills.
- People do not spread rumors or gossip about others.

6. COMPASSION FOR OTHERS:

High-character people extend unmerited kindness to others.

Compassionate people are moved by their conscience, rather than their emotions alone, to be genuinely benevolent and giving. They not only respect others, but they are compelled to understand and selflessly help them. They abhor meanness, cruelty and neglect. They treat kindly even the “hard-to-love” with true sincerity.

Observable virtues: kind, gentle, patient, encouraging, benevolent and generous.

Typical examples include:

- People are willing to give their own time to help a colleague.
- People treat all others kindly and with care, regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy.
- People make an effort to respect and accommodate the personal needs of individuals in the organization.

7. FORGIVENESS:

High-character people understand they are far from perfect and seek, with humility, to extend and receive unmerited acceptance from others.

Forgiving people recognize that everyone, including themselves, will at some point act unwisely or violate principles. They forgive others and genuinely seek forgiveness to reconcile or restore relationships damaged by their actions.

Seeking forgiveness requires the offender to confess their error. Extending forgiveness is an act of understanding, even when undeserved, by the person who was offended. High-character people are thankful when forgiven and are motivated to forgive inevitable offenses against them.

Observable virtues: patient, grateful and merciful.

Typical examples include:

- People go directly to a person they have hurt, take responsibility for the offense and ask to be forgiven.
- Admitting an offense or error is considered a strength of character, not a weakness.
- People do not harbor ill feelings or hold grudges; there is an absence of “backbiting” and seeking revenge.
- When inadvertently and inevitably offended, people tend to be patient.

8. UNITY:

High-character people strive to build relationships that foster harmony and collaboration among others who share a common promise, mission or purpose.

High-character leaders seek unity of purpose within their teams so they can work together effectively. Shared character ethics and agreement on goals among otherwise diverse people create unity. Therefore, high-character leaders deliberately and persistently encourage team commitment to the mission and goals.

Observable virtues: reconciler, integrator and collaborator.

Typical examples include:

- People are committed to and work toward a common set of character ethics.
- People truly care about the success of a unit, team or organization, not their own glory.
- Inevitable disagreements usually lead to better solutions and deeper commitment.
- As a rule, the ethic of unity supports teamwork, and harmony exists across groups or departments.
- People are committed to an identified and common set of character ethics.

VALUES OTHERS

9. LEARNING & MENTORING:

High-character people are lifelong learners and teachers.

They actively seek to learn more and share that knowledge with others. They desire to learn more about themselves, become better people and help others do the same.

They nurture teaching relationships in order to maximize the character and competency of others; they are mentors. Mentors endeavor to invest their lives in others to help them reach their greatest potential and, in turn, help others do the same.

Observable virtues: curious, creative, teachable and inspirational.

Typical examples include:

- People are good coaches and teachers, not just bosses.
- Each junior member of the team is coached by a peer who serves as a mentor.
- People are encouraged and recognized for trying new techniques or methods aimed at improving performance.
- Growth in knowledge and skill is recognized.
- Training is available and encouraged for everyone.
- People are committed to learning and mentoring others.

10. SERVING-LEADERSHIP:

High-character leaders put the success of others and the group above themselves.

Servant leaders model and mentor high-character conduct and create an inspiring environment in which members can grow and flourish. They are not driven by power or personal glory, but rather by a concern for the betterment of individuals, the group and society as a whole.

Observable virtues: selfless, optimistic, future-oriented and visionary.

Typical examples include:

- Leaders make every effort to give their team what is needed to accomplish their tasks.
- Leaders teach and train their team and are available for consultation.
- Leaders establish work methods and procedures that allow the team to succeed, not fail.
- Leaders do not ask people to do what they would not do themselves.
- Leaders lead by example and model the character they desire in others.

11. HONORING AUTHORITY:

High-character people respect boundaries for behavior.

They help shape and then abide by the legitimate regulations and boundaries established by legitimate authorities. They strive to live within those boundaries for the betterment of all.

They understand that laws and rules apply to them, not just others. They expect the same of those around them. When others violate laws, rules or ethics, they take wise action to justly hold them accountable.

Observable virtues: dutiful, law-abiding and civil.

Typical examples include:

- People make every effort to follow the directives of their supervisors.
- People operate within the boundaries of policies and procedures.
- People honor the office even if they do not care for the officeholder.
- People hold themselves and others accountable for following laws, rules and ethical standards.

SEEKS RESULTS

12. JUSTICE:

High-character people uphold truth, expose error and correct wrongs.

Just people are diligent in weighing evidence and seeking out the truth. They analyze and evaluate individuals and information carefully. They protect the innocent while holding the guilty accountable. They strive not to be harsh, exasperating or manipulative.

Just people try to objectively determine what outcome, however difficult or painful, is right.

Observable virtues: impartial, unbiased, diligent and decisive.

Typical examples include:

- Decisions affecting people are not hasty; facts are gathered and thoroughly considered.
- Good behavior is rewarded as often as wrong behavior is confronted.
- People do not play favorites; all operate by the same rules and have the same opportunities.
- People do not intentionally use harsh or manipulative means to gain an advantage.
- When a wrong is committed, regardless of the outcome, the offender is confronted with the wrong.

SEEKS RESULTS

13. COURAGE:

High-character people consistently and persistently act on their strong convictions.

Courageous people demonstrate strength by taking risks and persevering through danger, fear, accusations or difficulty. They are not intimidated by or overly concerned with the opinions of others.

They do not give up. They consider alternatives and aggressively pursue actions that produce desired outcomes while making every effort to preserve unity and trust. They do not resist change, but rather lead into new directions while remaining focused on the end goal.

Observable virtues: tenacious, determined, unwavering, strategic, resilient and gritty.

Typical examples include:

- People are willing to take risks in performing new functions or activities.
- There is a positive atmosphere supporting entrepreneurship, experimentation and innovation.
- There is an absence of the attitude, "This is the way we have always done it."
- People stick to a task and see work through to completion, regardless of obstacles.
- Individuals share their thoughts and ideas openly without fear, even in the presence of leaders.
- Failures lead to new ideas with renewed energy, not devastation or an attitude of "giving up."

14. ACCOUNTABILITY:

High-character people scrutinize themselves and welcome the scrutiny of others.

They adopt a transparent style that invites inspection and do not isolate themselves or their actions from others. This openness is essential to creating transparent, collaborative environments.

They place themselves in relationships that motivate self-examination and encourage constructive critique from others, particularly those they serve.

Observable virtues: open, up-front, self-disclosing and transparent.

Typical examples include:

- People do not hide their actions; they operate in the open.
- People encourage peers and others to give them feedback regarding their behavior and communications.
- Job performance is routinely discussed with peers and supervisors.
- Peers tell each other the difficult truth.
- Peers demonstrate a commitment to each other rather than competition with each other.

15. STEWARDSHIP:

High-character people live as if they will eventually reap what they sow.

They actively identify with the role of trustee or steward rather than owner. They perceive their function as a resource or role "caretaker" for a limited time. As a result, they regard positions and possessions as being held in temporary trust.

Therefore, they care for their respective positions and possessions diligently and seek to add value to every role and resource to which they have been entrusted.

Observable virtues: careful, orderly, generous, shrewd and watchful.

Typical examples include:

- People are frugal and diligent in protecting organizational resources.
- People make every effort to add value to teams, projects and the organization, not simply put in their time.
- Expenses are carefully considered as investments, with attention given to the potential return.
- Eliminating waste and protecting financial health become habits and part of the culture.

16. SEEKING COUNSEL

High-character people seek wise counsel, particularly when confronted with ethically ambiguous issues.

Because they are guided by a tireless pursuit of truth, they regularly seek the wisdom of others of high character. After carefully weighing the advice they receive, they act.

The goal of this process is wise action (what is right), rather than popular action (what would make one appear good) or solely pragmatic action (what might appear to work). The result of a decision made with wise counsel is a clear conscience, and the fruit of a clear conscience is contentment.

Observable virtues: thoughtful, curious and discerning.

Typical examples include:

- People naturally seek input or ideas from leaders, peers and subordinates regarding their analyses or plans.
- People who seek input or feedback are not considered weak or incompetent.
- Leaders readily admit that they do not have all the answers.
- People are more concerned about reaching the best decision than they are about who gets the credit.
- Feedback is valued and routinely sought.

SEEKS RESULTS

17. RESPONSIBILITY

High-character people fulfill their personal responsibilities as good citizens.

Responsible people exercise restraint and self-control so that the need for public controls is minimized. They understand the obligations of good citizenship and strive to communicate and live by high-character ethics. They intentionally call others to do the same in order to preserve liberty for everyone.

Observable virtues: self-governing, self-controlled and self-disciplined.

Typical examples include:

- People take responsibility for their role or function and do not wait to be told what needs to be done.
- Few rules and regulations are needed for people to work effectively.
- People focus on working smart and achieving their objectives, not on how much time is spent.
- People exercise self-control.

18. EXCELLENCE

High-character people strive to be their best, knowing that this enables them to do their best every day.

Excellence is the result of both high character and high competence. People who have knowledge and skills but are not honest, respectful or persevering will not be as successful as those who possess those qualities.

A “culture of excellence” is achieved when skillful, competent people behave ethically and diligently. True and enduring organizational excellence is therefore sustainable only through people of high character.

Observable virtues: enthusiastic, focused, determined and consistent.

Typical examples include:

- People truly strive to do their best on all tasks; they do not cut corners.
- Resources are generously allocated for training in knowledge and skill.
- Work products are typically complete, high quality and timely.
- Great results achieved the wrong way are not acceptable.
- People are thrilled when others are recognized for their contributions.
- Effort, improvement and high character are recognized as well as results.

DISPLAYS GROWTH

19. MATURATION

High-character people accept change and seek personal improvement over time.

They seek to apply their wisdom to their actions and develop habits of good character. They do not persist in habits and behaviors that are wrong or reflect low character. This maturation takes time and requires practice and perseverance.

Observable virtues: positive change, healthy growth and wise choices.

Typical examples include:

- When confronted with considerable evidence that decisions or plans are wrong, people make changes rather than defend themselves to the end.
- When confronted with the need to change behavior, individuals work to do so, and there is evidence of changing habits or patterns of behavior.
- When there is disagreement, people strive to understand others’ views rather than working harder to defend their original position.

20. TRANSFORMATION

High-character people exhibit consistent, positive and intentional commitment to high character.

As people adopt habits of strong character ethics and strive to display them in their actions, they are transformed. While no one is perfect, high-character people find a way to make a habit of pursuing what is good and true and, correspondingly, find a way to avoid what is wrong or destructive.

If we are on a path to ethical maturity, we tend to more quickly self-correct, accept the critique of others and make changes. The development of high character grows best in environments that involve accountability, self-discipline and sacrifice.

Observable virtues: high character, ethical and conscientious.

Typical examples include:

- High character is defined and communicated regularly to all.
- High-character behavior is recognized and rewarded.
- People acknowledge that their character is the only thing that is 100% within their control.
- The pursuit of truth is valued more than money, recognition or position.
- There is evidence that people have actually changed and developed stronger character habits.

UncommonSense® FRAMEWORK

AT A GLANCE

1. SEEKING WISDOM

I strive to seek something greater than intelligence (knowing what is); I seek wisdom, knowing what is right or true.

2. TRUSTWORTHINESS

I strive to do what I say I will do.

3. INTEGRITY

I strive to be who I say I am and to stay true to my beliefs.

4. HONESTY

I strive to consistently speak the truth with compassion.

5. RESPECT

I strive to treat others as they would want to be treated.

6. COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

I strive to extend unmerited kindness to others as an act of my will.

7. FORGIVENESS

I strive to extend and receive from others unmerited acceptance.

8. UNITY

I strive to foster oneness among those to whom I am bound.

9. LEARNING & MENTORING

I strive to grow in wisdom and pass it on.

10. SERVING-LEADERSHIP

I strive to set the sacrificial example for others to follow.

11. HONORING AUTHORITY

I strive to respect boundaries and yield to those given responsibility for others.

12. JUSTICE

I strive to uphold truth, expose error and correct wrongs.

13. COURAGE

I strive to consistently and persistently act on my strong convictions.

14. ACCOUNTABILITY

I strive to self-scrutinize and seek the critique of others.

15. STEWARDSHIP

I strive to add value to all that has been entrusted to me.

16. SEEKING COUNSEL

I strive to overcome indecision and ignorance by securing wisdom from others.

17. RESPONSIBILITY

I strive to fulfill my personal responsibilities as a good citizen.

18. EXCELLENCE

I strive to be my very best as I do my very best every day.

19. MATURATION

I strive to accept change and seek personal improvement over time.

20. TRANSFORMATION

I strive to demonstrate a consistently improving, positive commitment to high character.