



Guide to form – Essay

If I can write in any form, which should I choose? This is the question we are most often asked. There is no ‘better’ or ‘worse’ form but the brief notes below may help you decide.

Give it a try! An **essay** is a short piece of writing on a particular subject. Essay also means ‘to try or to attempt’ – so it’s a good chance to try out new ideas in a short, exploratory piece of writing.

Orwell himself wrote lots of essays, on a very wide range of subjects, from toads to books, the atom bomb to English cooking, and you can read many of them for free [on our website](#). As with journalism, you will want to do some research before beginning your essay, to make sure you have the facts and information you need to explore your topic properly.

More so than journalism essays offer room for your personal voice and perspective. Essays can be serious, but you can also use your voice as a writer to add humour – as Orwell does here in ‘A Defence of English Cooking’:

We have heard a good deal of talk in recent years about the desirability of attracting foreign tourists to this country. It is well known that England’s two worst faults, from a foreign visitor’s point of view, are the gloom of our Sundays and the difficulty of buying a drink.

Both of these are due of fanatical minorities who will need a lot of quelling, including extensive legislation. But there is one point on which public opinion could bring about a rapid change for the better: I mean cooking.

It is commonly said, even by the English themselves, that English cooking is the worst in the world. It is supposed to be not merely incompetent, but also imitative, and I even read quite recently, in a book by a French writer, the remark: ‘The best English cooking is, of course, simply French cooking.’

Or here is an extract from ‘It’s Not Your Fault’, an essay by Katie Sherley, which was a junior Orwell Youth Prize winner in 2021:

It’s not your fault.

It’s not your fault we live in a world that is not made for women, that we are surrounded by people telling us that we are to blame. It’s not your fault that the burden of your safety falls on your own shoulders. It’s not our fault.

I learnt that half the world was out to get me before I learnt long division. They say ignorance is bliss, they justify their apathy by telling me that it feels safe, comfortable. I know they are right. It’s just a shame that that ignorance was never an option for us.