



Guide to form – Short Story

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.

Short and sweet. The **short story** usually focuses on the simple experiences of a character in two or three episodes. Often the protagonist will go through some significant change of attitude or outlook, perhaps as the result of a minor event, sometimes called an epiphany.

Orwell himself illustrates this perfectly in ‘A Hanging’, about the execution of a man in Burma:

It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working - bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming - all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live.

Read an extract from Orwell Youth Prize 2022 Runner Up, James Lomax’s short story, [‘The Conundrum of the Fossils’](#) here:

January 18th 1884

The day has been confusing, to say the least, but nevertheless I have achieved my goal. Upon entering the elegant hall that the Council resides in, I was greeted by Mr Percival and the other distinguished gentlemen, who had given me half an hour to detail my ambitions to them. I informed them of the situation of the fossils: how half a century of excavation has left the landscape covered by the remains of creatures from aeons past, how vulnerable these fossils are to weathering and the action of the waves, and how significant, nay essential, they are in revealing more of the rich history of life on our planet. An entire lost ecosystem could be gone forever if these processes continue at the same rate. As I spoke, I tried to weave passion in my words, aiming to rally these gentlemen like a military commander before a major battle.

And here’s what James had to say about how he created his characters:

“All the characters each represent different attitudes held by different people. The narrator is the one who understands the crisis and wants to do all they can to slow it but finds themselves relatively alone. Mr Percival is the public figure who gives an impression that they care but doesn’t really... Finally, everyone else represents the general public – they know about the crisis, and some of them care, but it’s not very important and only a minor aspect of their lives overall. When writing this piece, I wanted to exaggerate all these different kinds of people to essentially call them out and make them sound rightfully ridiculous.”