



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 [‘In 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.’

And here is an extract from [‘Blackpool’](#), an essay by Cerys Shanks, which was a senior Orwell Youth Prize winner in 2022:

Blackpool.

The Land of Oxymorons. A dull grey slab of land that is sectioned seemingly in the middle of nowhere, and yet the eyesore of The Tower breaks into your vision whenever you turn your head. A Pleasure Beach composed of overpriced food and hours spent standing around, doing nothing except listen to the distant shrieks of other people finally enjoying themselves. A Sandcastle crafted carefully by cranes-made of plastic and metal.

Cerys tells us more about the inspiration behind the form and style of her winning piece:

Whilst I was trying to write my entry for the Orwell Youth Prize, we were discussing travel writing in English Language as a possible option for coursework. Quite a few of the samples provided to us included descriptions and a slightly mocking edge towards the towns or cities. This definitely inspired the idea behind my piece.