



Guide to form – Drama and Screenplays

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.

All the world's a stage. **Drama** is for performing, so points tend to be explicit, spoken by characters who argue over ideas from opposite poles.

In 1000/1500 words drama is likely to be one scene or perhaps two or three short ones, and you would likely stick to a small cast of two or three characters.

Here, Caryl Churchill combines the personal and the political in an argument about Mrs Thatcher – between two sisters. (Note: overlapping speech is represented by /)

MARLENE First woman Prime Minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.

JOYCE What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you would have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. / Great adventures.

MARLENE Bosses still walking on the workers' faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual. Look at me.

JOYCE I am looking at you.

Here is the introduction and opening to 'Here There Are No People' by Noah Robinson, who was a Junior Runner Up in the 2020 Orwell Youth Prize:

The speakers all are children. The lines can be shared out in any way between the characters. They may be played by any number of actors.

1
I don't want to make anyone sad.
Why would I want to make you sad?
If I did want to make you sad, I would tell you the story of when we got on the boat.

2
We were having breakfast.
The bombs fell.
When will the war stop?

Noah tells us more about why he chose to write in the form of a play:

"Plays provide authenticity for unheard voices, drawing attention to often under-represented perspectives. We connect most deeply to human-driven stories and the immersion created from a shared experience with an audience can inspire social change."



Lights. Camera. ACTION! Similarly to a playscript, a **screenplay** is written to be performed, with a focus on dialogue and action.

In 1000/1500 words, you're probably going to want to stick to just one or two scenes. You can set out a screenplay similarly to a script for stage, with the character's name, what they're saying and how they're saying it, as well as brief descriptions of the setting, and directions for action.

Unlike a script for theatre, a screenplay can also include quick 'cutting' between scenes, flashbacks, and some more extreme action (e.g. you could have a car chase in a screenplay, or a big scene on a busy street with lots of characters – which would be much more difficult to act out on a stage!)

1) Begin each scene with this information, in capitals:

INT/EXT – Interior/Exterior (Indoors or outdoors)

PLACE

DAY/NIGHT

2) Give a few lines briefly describing the setting, if it's a new setting. These can be in short sentences/don't need to go into too much detail. Keep it clear and simple.

3) If necessary, describe any movement/the Point of View (POV) we are seeing the action from.

4) When characters are introduced, include a brief description. The character's name should be in capitals.

5) For dialogue, write the character's name and put the words they are saying underneath their name. Info about how they're speaking can be included in brackets – e.g.

O'BRIEN (*softly*)

Big Brother is watching you.

6) If you're moving to a new scene, end your scene with 'CUT TO'. End your script with 'CUT TO BLACK/FADE TO BLACK'.

7) You can split description/action with dashes/ellipses to give a sense of the pace/build suspense.

You can find lots of examples of scripts, for TV and for film, in the BBC Writersroom Script Library: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scripts>

And here's an example from Orwell Youth Prize 2021 winner, Anya Edgerton's screenplay '[A Small Thing](#)':

CLARA

No... it's not that.. just... we always have to study
the work of very posh and very dead white men
and metaphors I can't understand... It just doesn't feel...
(motions as she struggles to find the word)
relevant.