

KILL YOUR DARLINGS

KYD School Writing Prize Helpful Hints: Non-Fiction

What is the issue you want to explore?

Before getting started, sit down and decide what the main issue you want to explore is, then write it down. Choose only one main issue, and you should be able to sum it up in a few words.

It should be something that matters to you – even if it doesn't impact you directly, it should be something you care about and feel strongly about because that will come through in your writing.

What's the best way to explore this issue?

Decide what structure works best for both you and for exploring the ideas you want to get across.

Essay: Often this can be the best way to include a lot of information. You can weave in research and interviews as well as opinion, and it allows you to control how the “story” unfolds.

EXAMPLE: ['Pipelined into Prison: Young Women and the Prison Industry' by Fernanda Dahlstrom](#)

Interview: This is where the focus of the piece is on one or two interviewees. There is a lot of overlap with an essay here, especially in terms of letting the topic unfold, but in this case you are using another person's experience to help shape the story you want to tell about the issue you are exploring

EXAMPLE: ['Black Saturday — A Conversation with Chloe Hooper, author of The Arsonist'](#)

Opinion piece: This is where you are tackling the topic from your perspective, making a specific argument and then backing it up. This can be good if you are trying to persuade the reader to one point of view

EXAMPLE: ['Wedded to the System' by Rebecca Shaw](#)

Other: There are creative alternatives to the above (writing it as a letter, a list, etc.) The key thing to think about is what do you think is the best way to express what you want to say.

Your role in the piece

Think about whether you want it to be formal or informal and whether you want to be in it or not – more specifically if you are going to use words like “I” and “me” in the piece, or if you are going to be writing it as an observer. Including yourself and terms like “I think” can come across as more informal and as opinion, but including yourself as a “character” can also be a good technique to draw readers in and convince them of your ideas, especially if you are doing an interview.

Shaping the piece

The basic things that should be included in the piece, roughly in this order are:

- What is the issue?
- Why is it important?
- What does the reader need to know in order to care about the issue too?
- Conclusion

With the conclusion you don't have to solve the issue – no one expects you to. Indeed, your conclusion could reveal a new set of questions that need to be asked, now that the initial problem is clearer. However, for the piece to be effective you need to have a goal in mind. That can be as simple as wanting people to be better informed about the issue you have chosen so that they know something needs to be done.