

# Chapter 5: Short Articles

## Introduction

---

**SHORT ARTICLES ARE SIMILAR TO TALKS AND LETTERS IN THAT THEY TYPICALLY REQUIRE YOU TO MAKE A CASE OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER.**

In one past exam students were asked to make a case opposing or supporting a school trip. In another they were asked to make a case for a particular Irish town as a must-see tourist attraction.

Sometimes you will be specifically asked to write an opinion piece or persuasive article. In such cases it's vital that you actually do have an opinion on the topic and express it at the beginning of your article. For example, if you're writing about the benefits of sport don't ramble on for five paragraphs about last night's match. Take a stance and express it early.

Sometimes the question can be phrased in a more general manner. You might be asked, for instance, to write an introductory article for a book about ordinary people. Even with such a general question it is often best to take a definite stance which you develop throughout the article. You might make the case, for instance, that the everyday heroism of ordinary people is underrated in this age of celebrity.

### PLAN IN ADVANCE

With short articles, as with all compositions, it is important to plan in advance before you begin to write. Your short article should contain four or five paragraphs. Take the time to jot down what each paragraph will be about before you start writing.

### MANAGE YOUR PARAGRAPHS

In short articles you are generally trying to make a case. Sometimes, you might want to state this point plainly in your opening paragraph. We see this in the following opening to an article entitled 'Modern music has little merit'.

The standard of popular music is in decline. The artists who now top our charts are, in the main, talentless, shallow creatures whose careers are short-lived – here today and gladly forgotten tomorrow. There is no depth to what they have to say, the lyrics that they spout depressingly devoid of genuine sentiment and meaning. They are part of an industry that is all about profit, an industry in which the artist and the music that he or she creates is disposable, a sound that is briefly heard and signifies nothing.

It is also possible to begin your article with an 'impact' paragraph that grabs the audience's attention before stating your point clearly in the second paragraph. The 'impact' paragraph might often focus on a shocking statistic, real-life story or dramatic event that brings your point vividly to life. For example:

The Beatles, Joan Baez, the Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley, Led Zeppelin, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Aretha Franklin. These are the giants of the music world. Their rise to prominence began decades ago and their music and lyrics continue to reverberate melodiously across the sound-waves long after they have shuffled off this mortal coil. Their talent is a precious guiding light in this dark age of music. Look at today's crew of talentless pretenders. How many of those will still be loved and revered by our children and grandchildren? Pop music is dying a slow and tuneless death.



In each of the two or three body paragraphs you should focus on a single topic. Each paragraph should support the point you make at the beginning of the article. In the body paragraphs of your article, you can use facts and statistics to appeal to your audience's intellect. You can also use real-life stories and emotional language to appeal to their hearts. Every single paragraph should be geared towards one thing: convincing the audience that your point of view is correct.

The closing paragraph should briefly summarise the main points of the article before concluding with a snappy, memorable phrase. It can also be very effective to conclude your article with a rhetorical question that will linger in the audience's mind.

### HAVE PURPOSE AND FOCUS

As you compose, always remain conscious of your article's purpose. Every paragraph should be geared towards advancing your stance or point of view. Remember you will be penalised if you ramble or drift off topic. Advance planning will prevent this. Keep your plan open in front of you as you compose.

### TONE AND REGISTER

The tone of your article will vary depending on the topic and the article's intended readership. An article for a school website about the need for longer lunch breaks, for example, might be written in a light-hearted tone. An article for a national newspaper about the issue of unemployment will, however, require a more serious or formal tone to be adopted. What is important to remember is that, once you adopt a given tone, be it serious or light-hearted, stick to it throughout the article. Reading the samples that follow will give you a sense of what is required here.



## Walk Thru 1



Write a short article entitled 'Why we should lower the voting age to 16'.

### PLANNING

My first task is to establish a point of view. I see that the title of the article has done this for me. I know what case I have got to make here. I must give clear reasons why we should lower the voting age.

Now I'm going to structure my article. Five paragraphs will be enough for a short article like this one.

- 1: The first paragraph, the introduction, will clearly state my point of view.
- 2: The second paragraph will deal with the many legal entitlements that 16-year-olds already possess.
- 3: The third paragraph will argue that young people, contrary to popular belief, have a real interest in politics.
- 4: My fourth paragraph will deal with the fact that young people are often the ones most affected by political decisions.
- 5: In my final concluding paragraph I am going to try to sum up my position in a snappy and memorable way.

### WRITING

I will start with my introduction. This will be a relatively short paragraph and will engage with the topic and state clearly my point of view:

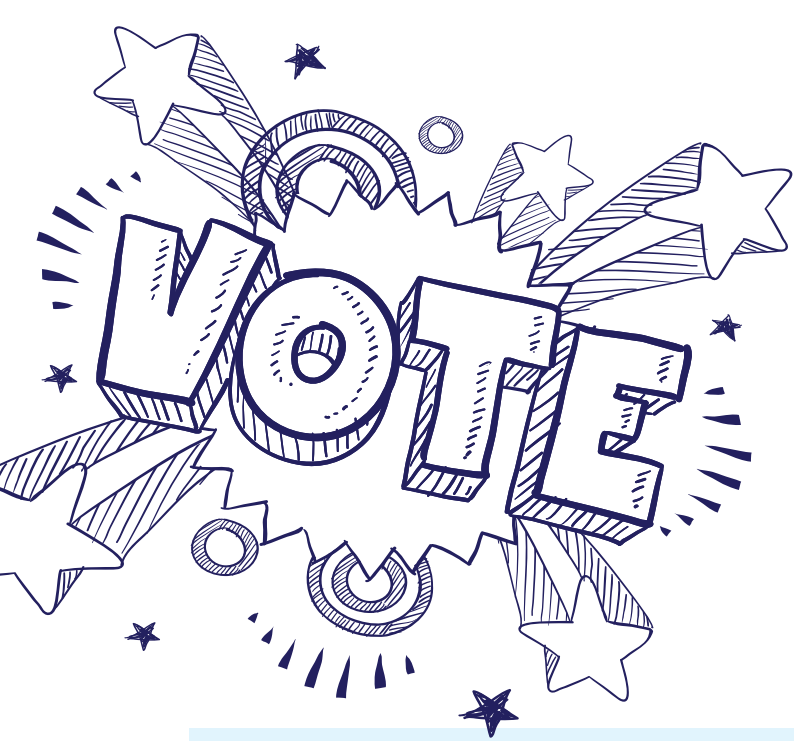
In Ireland, 16-year-olds are granted quite a number of adult privileges and responsibilities. However, they are not permitted to vote. Withholding this right from our youths is unfair, especially when we consider that by many legal and financial definitions 16-year-olds are already considered adult.

I see from my plan that my first body paragraph will deal with the fact that 16-year-olds already have numerous legal entitlements. I will start the paragraph with a short topic sentence, a sentence declaring what the paragraph is going to be about:

16-year-olds have many legal entitlements.

Every other sentence in this paragraph is going to relate to or expand on this topic sentence. If I find myself writing something that does not relate directly to this topic sentence I know I've gone wrong.

To complete this paragraph I am going to back up my topic sentence with some relevant facts about these entitlements. I am going to mention their entitlement to work, to drive, to travel unaccompanied and to possess a firearm:



They are legally entitled to work a 40-hour week – and subject to all of the lovely taxes and charges associated with it, including PAYE, PRSI, and the Universal Social Charge. Provided they hold a valid licence, a 16-year-old can legally drive mopeds, work vehicles (i.e. tractors) and certain types of motorcycles. They can travel abroad unaccompanied, be held criminally responsible and charged for illegal activities. They can open a bank account. They can even apply for a licence to own a firearm! These all sound mature and adult to me. And yet they cannot vote. Is this fair?

Note how every sentence I have written relates to my topic sentence. I don't wander off the point by talking about my favourite computer game or social networking activities.

Note how I concluded with a question that challenges the reader. This is an effective device when we are looking to persuade someone of our point of view.

I see that my next paragraph is going to examine the notion that young people are not interested in politics. Once again I start off with the simple topic sentence – 'Let no one say that teens are simply not interested in politics' – immediately arguing that this is untrue. Then I am going to write a number of sentences that relate to this topic sentence. I'm going to make sure that nothing I write strays from this topic.

Let no one say that teens are simply not interested in politics. Those who argue against giving youths a vote because they think 16-year-olds pay no attention to political discourse, wouldn't take it seriously and are not able to make informed decisions about it, are being unreasonable and hypocritical. Secondary school students in this country are obliged to study CSPE up to Junior Cert level. They are forced to learn about the country's political and electoral system.

Again I will round the paragraph off by challenging the reader to see the unfairness in denying 16-year-olds the right to vote:

And yet they are denied the right to vote. Is this fair?

My final body paragraph will deal with the fact that young people are often the ones most affected by political decisions. Again, I will begin with a clear topic sentence and back this up with relevant facts supporting my argument:

Children and teenagers are often the ones who experience the impact of political decisions ahead of everyone else. If there are cutbacks in education, they will bear the brunt of that – not politicians. If there is a change to the curriculum, they are the ones who test it out. And, indeed, if things are not changed when they clearly need to be changed, they are the ones who will suffer most without it. And yet they have no say in who should have the privilege of making these decisions. Is this fair?

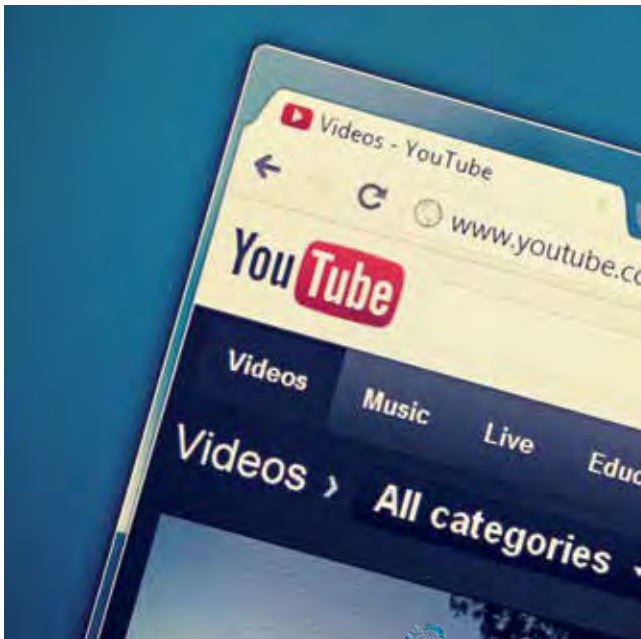
In my conclusion I want to briefly summarise the argument I have made in the article.

The answer is no, it's not fair. When so much expectation and responsibility is placed on the average Irish 16-year-old, it seems illogical not to also give them the right to vote.

I would like to conclude my article with a powerful and memorable message. I will link the voting restrictions placed on 16-year-olds with the fact that society once denied women the right to vote.

You have to wonder why so many politicians are against it. Do they fear the changes the young people of this country could bring about? Once upon a time, society didn't allow women to vote. We look back on those restrictions now and we can't believe how insulting and unfair they were. Some day – hopefully some day soon – we will look back on the same voting restrictions we once placed on 16 and 17-year-olds, and we will think the same thing: insulting and unfair.

Note how the conclusion is short and does not ramble on and on repeating the points made in the article. Note also how the conclusion is tied into the point of view established at the start of the article.



## Walk Thru 2



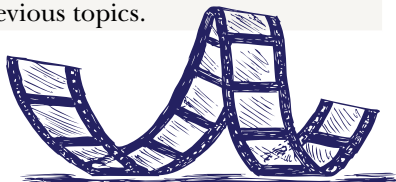
Write a short article entitled 'Playing the fame game'.

### PLANNING

I must first establish a point of view: I believe that the culture of celebrity is unhealthy and has a malign impact on society.

This is a short article. Five paragraphs should suffice.

- 1: In the first paragraph, the introduction, I will state clearly my point of view that society, young people in particular, are obsessed with fame.
- 2: In the second paragraph, I will talk about the popularity of celebrity photo magazines, which publish intrusive pictures of celebrities' personal lives
- 3: In the third paragraph, I will point to the growth of celebrity television shows, packed with B-list celebrities who are famous for being famous.
- 4: In the fourth paragraph I will examine how the celebrity culture is leading many people to seek their own exposure through YouTube, vines, Instagram selfies, Facebook and Twitter.
- 5: In the fifth and final paragraph I will wrap up by concluding with a strong point that draws together the previous topics.



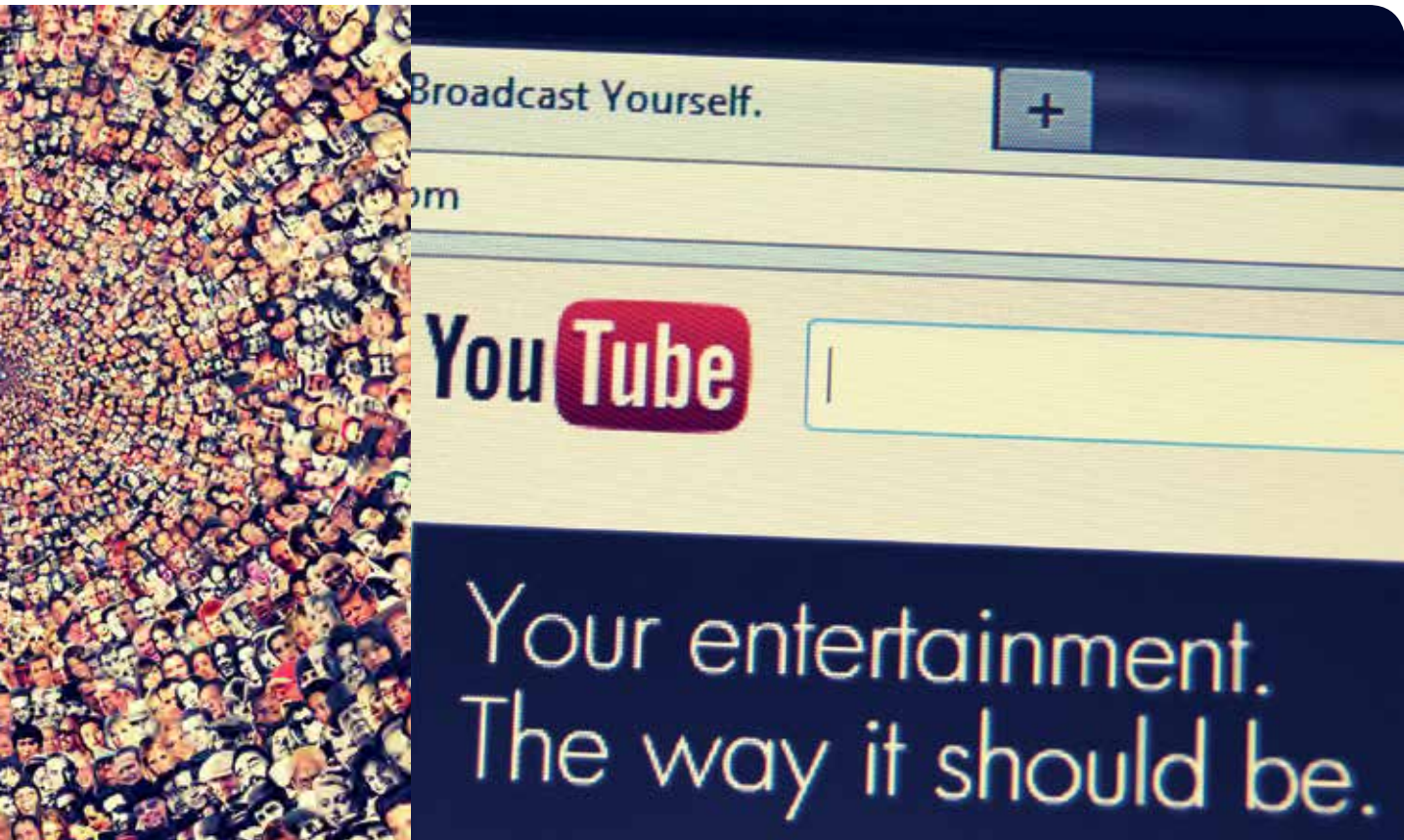
### WRITING

Now I must write my introduction. I will state my point of view straight away. This decides the direction of the entire essay.

The culture of celebrity has grown to become a monstrous vehicle of desperation, hysteria and obsession. Society – young people in particular – has an infatuation with fame. We have an intense craving for information about and insights into the lives of actors, musicians and TV personalities, and it is driving us all to seek out our own fame. This might not seem like a big deal, but the impact of what Lady Gaga herself called 'the fame monster' is really damaging.

My plan says that the second paragraph should be about magazines that are full of pictures of celebrities.

This is a terribly unhealthy trend. We are all familiar with those trashy magazines that decorate the shelves of our newsagents. They are printed in garish colours and grainy photographs of second-rate celebrities doing totally unimportant things (like going to the beach, or getting out of a car) are splashed all over the covers, as if it was breaking news. Most of them aren't even justifiably famous. They are simply famous for being famous and not because they are exceptionally talented. These photos are designed to do one of two things: To put ordinary people up on a pedestal above the rest of us, to be adored and worshipped; or to expose all their flaws in order to shame them.



The next paragraph, according to my plan, should be about the rise of the celebrity television shows.

Fifteen years ago, nobody ever heard of reality television and the only talent show worth gossiping about was Eurovision. Now, there's almost nothing else to watch except this rubbish. From 'X-Factor', to 'I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here', 'Strictly Come Dancing' and 'America's/Britain's Got Talent', there is an endless supply of low-grade celebrity programmes filling our television channels. They're almost exclusively populated by B-list celebrities who are trying to resurrect their careers, or ordinary people who are desperate for the limelight. They make a profit by broadcasting the auditions of the most talentless people – again, just so that viewers can point and laugh at them – and even the winners disappear into obscurity after a year or two, only to be replaced by other would-be starlets.

This is leading more and more of us to seek out our own fame. We pose for ridiculous 'selfies' on Instagram, broadcast our every opinion, thought and emotion on the likes of Facebook and Twitter, and churn out 15-second 'Vines' of our reactions and 'fails'. Even the name YouTube points to the growing pomp of today's celebrity-obsessed culture. It sells a message. Make a video about you, broadcast you to the world. But this is a very risky idea. We are literally putting our lives into other people's hands. Playing the fame game is leading people to do some stupid things and exposes them to needless criticism and abuse.

Now I want to wrap up. I want to make a powerful point that shows how unhealthy, silly and negative the celebrity culture is, and how we should save our admiration for people who really make a difference.

This poisonous celebrity culture is bringing out the worst in us. The more we revere people in the world around us, the worse we start to feel about ourselves. It tricks us into building our sense of self-worth on the approval of strangers we never meet. We want people to be impressed by us. We try so hard to replicate these celebrities, to get on television, to go viral, to be liked, shared, followed, retweeted, admired. Loved. Fame is like a desert mirage – something we thirst for, something that looks good from afar but that ultimately doesn't exist. We should save our adoration for those who truly make a positive impact on the world and on ourselves.



# Exercises

**1. When writing an opinion piece or persuasive article, what must you always do?**

You might begin your article with an 'impact' paragraph. What might such a paragraph consist of?

**2. What should you aim to achieve in your closing paragraph?**

**3. The following is the topic sentence of a paragraph in a short article on the benefits of travel. Read it carefully and then complete the paragraph:**

It cannot be denied that travel broadens the mind.

**4. The following is the topic sentence of a paragraph in a short article about the Irish diet. Read it carefully and then complete the paragraph:**

When compared with many of our European neighbours, the Irish diet seems dull and uninspired.

**5. Rearrange the following five sentences so that they create a properly structured paragraph:**

Bus and train routes are being cut, fares are going up and transport projects are being jettisoned in favour of building new roads.

We are consigning ourselves to endless traffic problems and our environment to an ugly, polluted fate. Looking at public transport, it's clear that the government does not intend to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

With policies like these in place, we have no hope of meeting our targets and will be fined by the EU.

Despite a growing body of evidence to suggest there is an appetite among the people to use public rather than private transport, our politicians have made it more difficult and costly than ever to do so.

**6. Rearrange the following sentences so that they form a properly structured paragraph:**

The fights – called The Hunger Games – are held every year and are designed to both entertain the nation and as well as punish districts that rebelled in an earlier civil war.

*The Hunger Games* is a movie based on a series of science fiction books by Suzanne Collins.

In this kill-or-be-killed world, Katniss and her friend, Peeta, must deal with life-threatening challenges and troubling moral decisions.

Katniss is forced to represent her district in a series of televised gladiatorial-style fights. It follows the story of teenage heroine Katniss Everdeen from District 12.

**7. The following paragraph was written for a serious national newspaper. Read it and then comment on whether or not the tone and language is appropriate.**

Nuclear power is just a bad idea and if we introduce it to Ireland it will go down as the biggest screw-up in our history. The stakes are way too high. The Yanks messed up with Three Mile Island, the Soviets with Chernobyl and the Japanese with Fukushima. If you put a nuclear plant in Paddy's hands, you can be sure the grass isn't the only thing that'll have a green hue.

**8. Complete this opening paragraph to an article of young people and politics:**

For many young people, politics is something that older people engage with. It is a tedious affair, populated with uninspiring individuals who have nothing to say to the youth of modern Ireland.

**9. Imagine you have been asked to write a short article about famine in the Sudan region. Work in pairs and write two different opening paragraphs. Make one an impact paragraph and the other a more standard, fact-based opening paragraph.**