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# FRAMEWORK OF IDEAS



WRITING  
ABOUT  
**PROTEST**

by Jarrod Sturnieks





# Framework of Ideas

Writing about protest

Jarrold Sturnieks

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► innovative ► engaging ► evolving

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# CONTENTS

<b>Exploring the key idea</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Exploring ‘Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978’</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Exploring ‘Freedom or death’</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Exploring ‘Harrison Bergeron’</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Exploring the monologue from <i>City of Gold</i></b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Creating your own writing about protest</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Sample responses</b>	<b>67</b>

# EXPLORING THE KEY IDEA

Protest is both a noun and verb. The noun 'protest' is the name attributed to the objection or opposition to something, while the verb 'protest' refers to making this declaration or objection in words or actions.

The following key terms will be useful for your writing about protest. You might like to use them as the basis for a word bank to which you can keep adding as you study this key idea.

Words with a similar meaning: *challenge, dissent, object, oppose, demonstrate, revolt, contest, remonstrate, resist, contest, defy, brave, dispute, rally, picket, strike, campaign, activism*

Words with a contrasting meaning: *acquiesce, agree, status quo, submit, oppress, yield, comply, approve, accept, consent, concur, concede, resign, surrender, capitulate*

## Ideas about protest

People protest for myriad reasons. The impetus or catalyst for protest can often be a situation's initial impact on an individual and therefore rooted in personal experiences. Protest can be an effective and important tool to express dissent, even if it is just one brave, lonely person taking a stand.

However, we do not live in a vacuum – we are all firmly entrenched in societies and cultures. People may protest as an instinctual response to something immoral, unethical or unjust in the world. Just as the wider social, political or cultural context surrounding an individual are factors in shaping who we are, these very factors can often come into conflict with our individual needs and preferences, and can cause discontent. Therefore, the act of protest can be both personal and highly political.

Our personal objections can also become political through the sharing of our experiences. Our protestations can help us raise awareness or consciousness, find support and inspiration from others, and mobilise and build a community with those of similar beliefs. Many important social movements begin with grassroots protesting and individuals taking a stand that leads to a groundswell of support for a cause that expands into the millions. The transformation from thought or belief to action is often referred to as activism: the vigorous crusading for change.

## The need to protest

There are a multitude of reasons one may feel compelled to protest, and many of these motives may shift, change or overlap. Some of the common reasons for protesting include the following.

- **Personal reasons:** Grievances or concerns are often rooted in individual experiences.
- **Social change:** Grassroots movements might promote equal rights, object to discrimination, suggest alternative ideas, broadcast particular issues, raise awareness or mobilise support.
- **Political change:** This can involve putting pressure on elected officials and holding them accountable, or objecting to those who assert power unelected. The type of change demanded may be, for example, legislative, economic, or to do with environmental issues. Often changes demanded on the social level are then enshrined in law.
- **Human rights:** These kinds of protest might focus on raising awareness about and shedding light on breaches of rights, discrimination or atrocities locally or internationally.

Protest is often a way to speak truth to power. It is, above all, an appeal to be heard by others, with the aim of gathering support, building momentum and demanding change. The goal is often to pave the way for social progress, better governance and a safer, more inclusive world.

## The psychology of protest

As animals, we are wired with impulses and instincts to help us survive. One of these is the instinct of fight, flight or freeze – a survival mechanism that is triggered in the face of a perceived threat. Some will flee from danger, an act of self-preservation designed to protect our safety and physicality. Others will freeze, becoming immobile out of fear or panic, or perhaps to feign passivity as a defence mechanism.

Yet to fight is to sometimes sacrifice physical safety for the greater good, to confront issues head-on. When triggered, our bodies release stress hormones, our heart rates elevate and our breathing becomes rapid. Emboldened by this rush, we are often roused and motivated to act. As such, fighting back can work as a form of catharsis or release from this pent-up anger, frustration or resentment.

While this physicality can be used productively, it also helps to explain why some protests can become violent. This is particularly the case when

individuals come up against authorities who are often more powerful or more resourceful and therefore able to suppress dissent. Protests can expose an ugly side to humanity when even the best of intentions can descend into chaos, perpetuating more pain and further injustice.

## **The act of protesting**

When we picture protest, we often visualise banners, marching, speeches and picket lines. Many of the most successful movements of our time have adopted these familiar tactics – tangible signifiers of civil unrest and opposition.

Town squares in many cities were purposefully designed for individuals to gather, meet and share ideas. In medieval times, a town crier would command attention in these spaces for important declarations. As the West shifted away from autocracy and feudalism to embrace the principles of democracy, the town square offered access to any individual who wanted to express their opinions freely. Later, people used soapboxes to elevate themselves slightly, to be seen and heard better. The expression ‘standing on a soapbox’ has evolved to colloquially refer to anyone giving an impassioned public speech. Even today, town squares and the steps of government buildings and parliaments are spaces commonly occupied by protesters. In the digital era, many protests have shifted online to raise awareness among broader audiences that transcend physical borders.

But the act of protestation goes beyond slogans and manifestos. Acts of civil disobedience date back hundreds of years in virtually every country. Impassioned protesters often ‘take to the streets’ to disrupt or occupy spaces. Actions can speak louder than words. Activist Mario Savio explored this idea in a fiery speech at the University of California in Berkeley in 1964, in relation to limitations on freedom of speech and political expression being placed on students:

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

These disruptions can take the form of blockades or deliberate interruptions of events, operations or traffic. ‘Sit-ins’ and ‘lie-ins’ (sometimes referred to as simulated ‘die-ins’) are forms of passive or nonviolent resistance in which

groups of people sit or lie in public spaces; they are often symbolic in nature. Championed by Mahatma Gandhi, who campaigned for India's independence from Great Britain, and Martin Luther King Jr, who championed the rights of African Americans in the US, this refusal to cooperate or obey laws is a conscious way to make a point without resorting to violent means.

Other protesters have deliberately adopted violence as a means of forcing change. Although South African activist Nelson Mandela supported Gandhi's ideas about nonviolence, he grew frustrated and at one point consciously embraced armed resistance in order to fight apartheid (the political system that separated black and white people) in South Africa. Of the countless wars fought in the history of civilisation, many stemmed from disputes and disagreements that escalated to armed combat. Violence can certainly force and facilitate change, although not always for the better.

Ultimately the goal of protest is to bring about positive change. Without protest, societies can stagnate, the status quo reigns and those abusing power can continue with impunity. Therein lies the value of protest. Without brave, courageous rebels taking a stand, even in the face of severe consequences, there is often no progress, no evolution and no growth.

## **Protesting and democracy**

Protesting serves several human rights: freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the right to assemble. These are all rights that also underpin democracy. The fundamental tenet of democracy, at least in theory, is that all voices are equally valid. Protest encourages civic participation and expression, promoting dialogue and debate, essential components of an active, healthy democracy.

Both the United Nations and Amnesty International uphold the ability to protest as fundamental to human rights. Many constitutions and laws in democratic countries also enshrine and preserve these rights. These also extend to rights of privacy – to be free from surveillance or interference – and freedoms from arbitrary arrest, detention and punishment as a result of protesting.

But these rights are not recognised or upheld by all governments. In the eyes of many in positions of authority, protesters are seen as dangerous and a threat to their supremacy. The right to protest is still suppressed or challenged in many parts of the world, and sometimes intimidation, violence or imprisonment are used to deter opposition. Many governments and regimes in the modern world criminalise peaceful protests and even employ tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and other aggressive tactics that can often be lethal. Some use the media to control the spread of information and discredit

dissenters, while others use legal action to condemn those considered rebellious for simply exercising their right to protest.

Even in democratic countries, the right to protest can come under attack. Censorship of social media, surveillance in the public sphere, the shrinking of available public spaces and an increase in the militarisation of police are tactics used by some of the most progressive democratic countries in the world.

In the face of such tyranny and cruelty, it is often easier to acquiesce or comply than to fight. However, in countries where the right to expression and protest are outlawed, individuals can still find risky yet ingenious ways to demonstrate their dissent.

## **Protests in history**

It's safe to say that human beings have protested in some way or other since the beginning of time. Many of the freedoms and rights we enjoy today are the result of the brave stands taken by leaders, activists and everyday citizens who demanded to be heard. Whether activists were protesting against authoritarian control and leadership decisions, discrimination and inequality, or some other injustice, there have always been movements that challenge how societies run.

### ***Protests against authorities***

Many protests in ancient history were religious in nature, which is unsurprising as many cultures were centred around a theocracy where the church and state were one and the same. Various individuals and groups challenged the powerful authorities of their time.

Over half a millennium ago, Martin Luther (not to be confused with Martin Luther King Jr, who is discussed later in this guide) wrote and distributed his '95 Theses': a series of propositions that sought to oppose aspects of the Catholic Church, such as popes receiving payment for forgiving people for their sins. Allegedly, Luther nailed a list of his objections to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. His '95 Theses' protest led to considerable structural and social change throughout Europe via the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformation resulted in the formation of the Protestant Churches, separate from the Roman Catholic Church, and is considered one of the inciting events that began modern history.

Other important protests in ancient times focused on human rights breaches – particularly slave or peasant revolts that attempted to overthrow their oppressors (some successfully). These shifts in power in various countries across centuries even resulted in wars and revolutions that forcefully reformed and transformed societies and cultures.

Modern history has countless documented examples of important protests. Prominent street protests of the twentieth century have seen protesters publicly demanding that their elected officials put an end to war (e.g. the protests against the Vietnam and Iraq Wars) or demanding urgent environmental reform (e.g. the current climate strikes led by the young activist Greta Thunberg). Anti-authoritarian rebellions in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989 and in the Middle East with the Arab Spring uprisings in the early 2010s were broadcast worldwide to show the indomitable human spirit talking truth to power, often at great risk and consequence.

### ***Protests against racism***

The Australian Frontier Wars were tragic yet powerful acts of resistance from Australia's First Nations peoples. These involved a series of conflicts between European settlers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples beginning in 1788 and continuing into the twentieth century. As new European colonies emerged, so did acts of defiance from First Nations peoples across the continent, who were defending their country from invasion and even annihilation. The impacts of these protests are still felt today. Pemulwuy (c.1750–1802) was the charismatic and respected leader of the Bidjigal people who spearheaded a decade-long resistance against British colonisers in the late eighteenth century. Pemulwuy led the burning of crops and the killing of livestock in attempts to stop the encroachment of European settlement on his people's land. Although killed by British troops, his legacy as a warrior and freedom fighter continues to inspire in the continued struggle for equality, reform and reconciliation.

Throughout the twentieth century, First Nations peoples have protested for equality. From the Freedom Riders who travelled by bus to rural towns to protest segregation of parks, pools and pubs in 1965 to the Tent Embassy – a permanent protest site outside of Old Parliament House in Canberra established in recognition of First Nations land rights – the fight for equality continues. Australia's annual Invasion Day marches have placed increasing pressure on authorities to change the date of Australia Day and spread awareness of 26 January as a day of mourning rather than celebration.

In many ways, Australia's First Nations activists have tragic yet inspiring parallels to America's civil rights movement, which included its own Freedom Rides, acts of civil disobedience and countless public protests. Celebrated activists such as Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X shared a similar drive for racial equality in America but adopted drastically different modes of protest. Martin Luther King Jr's iconic 1963 'I have a dream' speech, one of the most famous and impactful pieces of protest writing, was delivered as

part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom – a nonviolent demonstration for civil rights that was attended by a quarter of a million people. This campaign starkly contrasted with the more militant approach of groups such as the Black Panther Party, who were inspired by the ideas and values proposed by Malcolm X and used violence as a means of self-defence and protest against police brutality.

### ***Protests against inequality***

The suffragettes who emerged in the late nineteenth century fought for women's right to vote and saw a wave of successful advocacy that overturned restrictive laws throughout the world. Prominent activists such as Susan B Anthony, Vida Goldstein and Emmeline Pankhurst gave voice to the marginalised, and inspired generations to follow. Where the first wave of feminism centred mostly on voting rights, the second wave in the 1960s and 1970s fought for equal pay, reproductive rights and sexual liberation. Icons like Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Dorothy Pittman Hughes and Germaine Greer became the faces of this movement to demand rights and equality for all women.

This fight helped to lay the groundwork for the #MeToo movement decades later, which involved women sharing their stories of sexual harassment and assault in order to hold perpetrators to account when the legal system failed to do so. The brave women in Iran daring to defy laws about restrictive dress or the only recently lifted laws that forbade women in Saudi Arabia from driving cars have proven that women's rights still have a long way to go.

Further activism for sexual liberation and equality has seen considerable progress being made for the LGBTQIA+ communities of the Western world. These have stemmed from the Stonewall riots of 1969, the first Mardi Gras in Sydney in 1978, Harvey Milk's activism in San Francisco in the 1970s, the ACT UP protests throughout the 1980s and 1990s to demand action on the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the marriage equality campaigns of recent years. The current battle for trans rights shows us that protest is an ongoing and vital struggle for human equality.

## Using the mentor texts

The selected mentor texts for Writing about protest are varied, to give you a broad understanding of the idea and a range of technical and language tools to use in your own writing. It's important to remember that the focus of this area of study is *your* writing: the mentor texts are there to inspire you and provide examples.

Keep in mind the following dos and don'ts when studying your mentor texts.

### Dos:

- Do read the mentor texts closely and carefully. Take note of the language, structure and techniques used by the authors.
- Do analyse how the authors use the idea of protest in their writing. Think about how they incorporate it into their themes, characters and plots, but also how the language and style contribute to their exploration of the idea.
- Do use the mentor texts as inspiration for your own writing. Think about how you can adapt and apply the techniques and ideas you have learned to your own work.

### Don'ts:

- Don't copy the mentor texts word for word. Plagiarism is unacceptable and can result in serious consequences.
- Don't rely too heavily on the mentor texts. While they can be helpful models, they are not a substitute for your own creativity and originality.
- Don't limit yourself to the mentor texts. Explore other sources of inspiration and develop your own unique ideas and writing style.
- Don't *respond* to the mentor texts. There is no need to explain how another author has approached the idea.

## Mentor texts

In order to get the most out of the mentor texts, be open-minded about your preferred style of writing. You may think that you only like fiction or only like nonfiction, but you should be prepared to experiment with different styles and forms. The mentor texts set for study provide a variety of models and examples for you to draw on. The four set texts are summarised in the following table.

Author	Title	Form	Useful for
Mark Gillespie	'Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978'	Essay	Exploring the personal in the political, LGBTQIA+ rights, queer history and the role of future generations within the context of a public street protest





Emmeline Pankhurst	'Freedom or death'	Speech	Exploring women's suffrage, equality, the subversion of gender expectations and the use of legislature to silence voices that are calling for social and political reform
Kurt Vonnegut	'Harrison Bergeron'	Short story	Exploring ideas about autonomy and equality through the depiction of a totalitarian government that controls via surveillance, interference and oppression
Meyne Wyatt	Monologue from <i>City of Gold</i>	Monologue	Exploring the pervasiveness of racism, stereotyping and typecasting, overt and covert means of disempowering First Nations peoples and the paradox of speaking out about such injustices

Each of these mentor texts will be covered in detail later in this book.

## Supplementary texts

The following could serve as additional resources to further explore ideas about protest.

### Plays

*Lysistrata* by Aristophanes

*The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project

*Two Brothers* by Hannie Rayson

### Novels

*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (especially Part 1: 'The Hearth and the Salamander' and Part 3: 'Burning Bright')

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (especially Book 1: Chapter 7 and Book 3: Chapter 1)

*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (especially Chapter 6)

*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (especially Chapter 23)

*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* by Thomas Keneally

*Bobbin Up* by Dorothy Hewett (especially Chapters 12 and 16)

## Nonfiction texts

*Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin

*The Ninth Life of a Diamond Miner: A Memoir* by Grace Tame

*No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* by Greta Thunberg

## Films

*Gandhi* directed by Richard Attenborough

*Selma* directed by Ava DuVernay

*Malcom X* directed by Spike Lee

*Suffragette* directed by Sarah Gavron

*Milk* directed by Gus Van Sant

*Fruitvale Station* directed by Ryan Coogler

*Norma Rae* directed by Martin Ritt

## Documentaries

*Ningla A-Na* directed by Alessandro Cavadini

*How to Survive a Plague* directed by David France

*13<sup>th</sup>* directed by Ava DuVernay

*The Australian Dream* directed by Daniel Gordon

*Brazen Hussies* directed by Catherine Dwyer

*An Inconvenient Truth* directed by Davis Guggenheim

## Poems/Songs

‘Beat! Beat! Drums!’ by Walt Whitman

‘I look at the world’ by Langston Hughes

‘Rosa Parks’ by Nikki Giovanni

‘In this place (An American Lyric)’ by Amanda Gorman

‘The new true anthem’ by Kevin Gilbert

‘The ranthem’ by Omar Musa

‘Anthem’ by Tiddas

## Speeches

'I have a dream' by Martin Luther King Jr

'The misogyny speech' by Julia Gillard

'We call BS' by X González

## Additional reading

Youth on Strike! website



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the website.

'5 of the Most Influential Protests in History' by Sarah Begley



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the article.

'The 10 Protests That Changed the Course of History Forever'



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the article.

“It felt like history itself” – 48 protest photographs that changed the world’  
by Gabrielle Schwarz and Felix Bazalgette



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the article.

# EXPLORING ‘FRIDAY ESSAY: ON THE SYDNEY MARDI GRAS MARCH OF 1978’

This section explores the first mentor text for Writing about protest: Mark Gillespie’s essay, ‘Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978’.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read the essay.

## Overview

Mark Gillespie is an anthropologist and English for Academic Purposes Specialist at the University of Sydney’s Centre for English Teaching. He marched with the ‘original 78ers’ at the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

His reflective piece, ‘Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978’, was first published in 2016 on the Australian online news and current affairs site, *The Conversation*. This website offers a forum for both academics and journalists to collaborate on articles that focus on public debate.

## Protest in ‘Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978’

Gillespie’s essay taps into and ruminates on various aspects of the first Mardi Gras in Sydney: the underlying causes; the wider cultural, political and historical context; the immediate aftermath; and its ramifications in the subsequent years and decades. While framing the story around the personal, he portrays himself as central to a broader movement and a wider queer community.

Like many significant protests throughout history and throughout the world, there were many reasons this demonstration occurred. Tired of living with ‘stigma and shame’ and emboldened by the 1969 Stonewall rioters (who were involved in an American act of queer resistance less than a decade prior), approximately 1000 people took to the streets ‘on a cold Saturday night in Sydney on June 24, 1978’. Living in a society that dehumanised them, discriminated against them and denied them equal rights, queer people were marginalised at best, abused and criminalised at worst. In Gillespie’s

recollection, he portrays the community as 'internally displaced'. He reveals how LGBTQIA+ people at the time were vulnerable to acts of harassment and violence and an ignorant medical community who used 'electric shock treatment' as a purported cure, one that left patients 'losing [their] mind'. Gillespie was himself a high school teacher, leading a 'double life' as a 'means of survival' and living with the threat of termination from his job should he come out.

The protesting captured in Gillespie's story is portrayed as a bold act of defiance from a group who marched to reclaim the streets as a safe space and to send a message to the wider society that they refused to be victimised any longer: 'We wanted the whole world to hear our cries for freedom from the oppression that characterised our lives. In numbers, suddenly, wonderfully, we were unafraid.' The piece is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of people working together, determined to force meaningful change.

Gillespie portrays the 1000 people in attendance as 'rainbow' in nature, 'with transgender and Aboriginal people and people from migrant backgrounds all mixing in'. This makes the case that such protesters are not a singular representation, but an eclectic gathering of individuals linked by a common cause. Later in the piece, he refers to straight people who also joined the ranks in an act of solidarity, highlighting the snowball effect and the importance of allies for a movement to gain real momentum: 'Chants rippled along the marchers, strangers joined hands and we sought to bring people out of the bars and into the streets to join us.' Furthermore, Gillespie pays tribute to those who were unable to march alongside them that evening, the 'so many wonderful young people who struggled with their sexual identities' and who ended up taking their own lives.

The marching itself is depicted as somewhat spontaneous and precarious, yet those protesting never waver or surrender. Equipped with only a truck designed to broadcast 'disco music for a party and a platform for speeches in the park', the marchers were initially met with disdain ('ratbag poofers'), hindrances ('we were denied entry'), blockades ('the cordon of police'; 'we were cut off and ambushed') and threats of arrest. With impressive fortitude, they refused to let these obstacles silence them; 'an exhilarating surge of energy' kept them marching onwards, pausing only to recalibrate and recruit others to bolster their numbers. Seeing those 'numbers swell' revitalised the crowd until Gillespie felt that 'there was no stopping' their cause.

Yet Gillespie's story also portrays the harsh repercussions for those daring to challenge an authority whose representatives were willing to use violence to intimidate, silence and tyrannise. Fifty-three marchers were arrested and

many more faced the wrath of the police force who 'acted as if they had a licence to inflict as much injury as they could'. This 'brutal onslaught' of state-sanctioned violence led the participants to be 'traumatised' and 'battered and bruised'.

A further humiliation occurred when those arrested had their names and occupations published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, after which 'many lost their jobs or housing'. Gillespie's story follows the pattern of many notable protests from the past – a battle of the powerless over the powerful. His story reflects the truism that those in positions of authority will do whatever it takes to stamp out dissent and to keep the marginalised in their place. Yet what is fascinating about accounts such as these is how power can shift as a result of protest, even in the space of a single night.

An interesting aspect of Gillespie's story is the conscious decision by the original 78ers not to adopt the same tactics as their oppressors: 'we as a collective knew instinctively that violence was one of our main grievances and we had a mission to resist it and fight against violence using other means'. In this way, the protesters were employing the same passive resistance and commitment to nonviolence as many freedom fighters before them, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

With the evening ending in disarray, Gillespie contends that the struggle was only just beginning. Despite wins that have occurred in the subsequent decades (the decriminalisation of homosexuality, reduced social stigma, police now marching in the parade annually), Gillespie is quick to note that homophobia is still prevalent and there is more work to be done on this front. Hanging over the anniversary of the original Mardi Gras was the lack of resolution or responsibility taken by those in power. Gillespie's story sadly shows that even decades after an initial protest, there are ramifications, unresolved grievances and buried traumas.

## Context

Written in 2016, the essay is reflective, looking back over time from the past to the present, and making connections to the current day to put earlier events into a historical context.

At the time of the initial march, homosexuality was still illegal in most parts of Australia. There were few protections in the law to safeguard queer people against discrimination and many in the medical community saw diverse gender expression and sexuality as a mental illness. Queer people faced open hostility and violence for just living their lives.

Although Gillespie highlights the progress in terms of LGBTQIA+ rights in the decades since, there are ongoing battles. The essay points out that even after homosexuality was decriminalised, the HIV/AIDS crisis devastated the community in the 1980s and 1990s. Even today, the suicide rates of queer people remain higher than those of the general population.

At the time of publication, Fairfax Media had not acknowledged its role in the damage they perpetrated and calls for a Royal Commission into police violence had fallen on deaf ears. As an important footnote to this story, both *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the NSW government formally apologised within days of Gillespie's story being published, almost forty years after the first Mardi Gras parade. The story of the original 78ers speaks of the power of people fighting together for change. Even if it takes years, decades or generations, justice can be done.

## Setting

Familiar references to Sydney landmarks appear throughout the piece: Oxford Street, Taylor Square, Hyde Park and Kings Cross are all central to the story. Yet it is more than a geographical excursion, it is an emotional and sensory one too. Gillespie focuses on the atmosphere of that historical evening in 1978, pointing out the 'exhilarating' and 'festive' mood when 'strangers joined hands' and recited 'cries for freedom'. The mood quickly sours as Gillespie contrasts the celebratory scene with 'reckless and ugly' attacks that resulted in 'pain, humiliation and suffering'. His use of evocative vocabulary to bring a place and situation vividly to life is a technique you can use in your own writing.

## Audience

In his essay, Gillespie reflects on how 'that night we were in the streets and we were determined to get our message to as many people as possible'. This statement has a double meaning that also applies to the purpose and audience of the 2016 essay. His target demographic is never explicitly referred to, as it is a very broad one.

In many ways, he is talking to the next generation of queer activists and passing the torch for more work to be done. Like folklore and wisdom passed on intergenerationally, the essay also highlights the work of queer elders to younger generations who may not have experienced the same level of cruelty, oppression or violence. As such, it ensures that stories like these are never forgotten and that the freedoms fought for are not taken for granted.

Yet the essay's appeal goes beyond a queer readership and the lessons learned here are vital for all social movements and acts of protest. His mention of the African-American spiritual song 'We shall not be moved' makes these links explicit. In your writing about protest you might consider how the protest you are focusing on might have connections to or resonances with other, similar protests in other places and/or times.

## Purpose

Gillespie's ultimate goal is to reflect on this momentous evening and immerse the reader in that night. His piece also serves to explain the context, express the frustrations and motivations of his community and argue for further advocacy. We are given firsthand access to this important moment in Australian history and Gillespie takes pains to engage and invest readers emotionally.

Gillespie is certainly appreciative and encourages the reader to 'celebrate just how far' the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as broader society, has come. Yet although Sydney's annual Mardi Gras has become one of the largest cultural events in Australia and one of the most famous LGBTQIA+ events in the world, Gillespie's poignant words serve to remind readers that 'the struggle is not over'. Behind the glitzy facade of floats, costumes and dancing in the modern parade, there remain 'fascist threats from all sides' to contend with. Gillespie's hope is for an 'open society' that is more accepting of differences and diversity. This presents itself as a challenge to readers to help enact this kind of change, reminding them that we all have a role to play in honouring and continuing the legacy of the protesters.

In moving society forward, Gillespie also passionately implores that the lessons of the 'original 78ers' be remembered, arguing that 'we need to resist attempts to whitewash our history and we need to make sure we do not lose the memories of our earlier struggles'.

## Structure

Adopting a somewhat nonlinear structure, the essay shifts from the contemporary time to the day of the first Mardi Gras protest in 1978, with references to the 1980s and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Sydney, before bookending the piece by returning to the present day. This allows the author to contextualise the protest and make important connections between past and present. The careful placement of subheadings and the use of signposting throughout means the piece remains fluent and clear, despite these shifts in time. This

is a technique you might use in your own writing about protest, particularly if your primary purpose is to explain or to argue, as these sorts of structural elements can help the reader to follow your line of thought.

Gillespie's introduction and concluding paragraphs reiterate the same idea – the question as to whether a long overdue formal apology from the government is warranted. This ties all of Gillespie's ideas and arguments together in order to reflect and ruminate on the best way forward for this movement. Although Gillespie himself welcomes an apology, in the final lines of the essay he insists that any forthcoming apology would need to be a 'living' one, coming with 'ongoing social investment in educational programs', to have any real weight or value. Selflessly, his goal here is for meaningful change for all queer people, to ensure that nobody endures the harassment or hostility he and his community faced.

The initial publication of the piece online was further enhanced with hyperlinks to queer archive libraries, YouTube clips, news articles and nonfiction publications for additional information about gay culture. This provides readers with even more context and an opportunity to learn more about the 1969 Stonewall riots, the musings of influential academic and activist Dennis Altman, and the electric shock conversion therapy that used to be inflicted on queer people. These links provide sources for Gillespie's piece, fill in any gaps and continue the important job of education to avoid this story being whitewashed or lost to history.

Scattered throughout Gillespie's narrative are several archival photographs. These images were mostly sourced by the Pride History Group and provided by the author. They are black and white (and often blue-tinged) photographs of common protest tropes such as banners, placards and clenched fists. Like Gillespie's anecdotes, these images give a face to the 1000 protesters. The original 1978 photographs are also juxtaposed with a colour image of the 2015 parade, which a jovial celebrating police officer joins, to show how far society has come in the subsequent decades.

## Voice

Gillespie's piece is effective because it captures a firsthand experience in an authentic voice. Anecdotal experiences are convincing and compelling on the page as they personalise issues in ways that generalisations or statistics cannot. Although Gillespie's story is uniquely his, he also gives voice to an entire community and speaks for those who cannot: for the silenced, the oppressed, the forgotten and those long gone. An important aspect of writing

about protest is speaking on behalf of a larger group and representing their interests to a broader audience.

Within Gillespie's writing is the duality of all people: the essay reflects how one can be vulnerable and tender, yet also strong and unapologetically bold. These contradictions and paradoxes are what makes us human. Gillespie's voice is relatable and effective, his tone alternating from reflective to resolute yet sustained by a clear purpose: to be heard and understood. Although written in a more formal register than conversational English, the purposeful word choices and the selflessness of digging deep and excavating decades-long pain results in a captivating read. The story of the protest is told with urgency and determination – much like the demonstration itself. Gillespie immerses the reader in that night almost four decades ago, capturing it as though it were only yesterday.

## Language

The purposeful use of inclusive language throughout helps to remind the reader that Gillespie's story is that of so many others, reflecting a community that banded together to force change. Very few of Gillespie's anecdotes are framed around an 'I' or a 'me/my' pronoun; instead, he repeatedly uses the inclusive terms 'we', 'us' and 'our'.

Although this is a mostly reflective piece with some necessary expository writing to inform and educate, Gillespie also uses persuasive techniques such as appeals to justice, fairness and compassion throughout the piece. One example occurs when he declares, 'our sexualities may have been diverse and different but that did not make us any less human than others'. These specific word choices help to evoke sympathy and fellow feeling in the audience, insisting that despite any perceived differences, these are fellow citizens equally deserving of fundamental human rights.

Underpinning Gillespie's appeals are statistics, expert opinion and other carefully referenced facts and evidence to anchor the piece with additional authority and credibility. While mostly written in past tense, the essay also speaks of a fundamental truth that some within society still need reminding of today. Shifting to present tense in the concluding paragraphs, Gillespie is insistent that the future will be a 'world that offer[s] the hope of ... a society where the role of the police shifts from suppressing the rights of minorities to protecting and even championing them'.

The occasional use of repetition and rhyme gives the writing a lyrical poeticism to emphasise the motivations for the protest. For example, in 'we

were criminalised, pathologised, demonised’, Gillespie’s purposeful word choices, and the steady rhythmic beat produced partly by the repeated ‘ised’ endings, are designed to have a potent impact on the reader, and also give the piece fluency and urgency.

As with many protests, slogans and chants are critical in distilling complex ideas down to memorable phrases. The refrain of ‘two four six eight, gay is just as good as straight!’ is remembered by Gillespie as a familiar chant used that evening, relying on a catchy rhyme structure to hammer home a fundamental truth.

## Characterisation

Although Gillespie narrates the story, other unnamed characters remind readers of community, strength in numbers and solidarity.

While personal recounts can be limited by a subjective viewpoint, Gillespie is careful not to weigh his story down with personal indulgences or tangents – we only learn what is necessary about him and his life in order for him to effectively tell this story. Instead, he characterises himself as one of many in the ‘rainbow’ community, referring to his fellow protesters as ‘brothers and sisters’ throughout.

Despite the obvious them-and-us contrasts depicted between the police and the marchers, it’s interesting to note that Gillespie doesn’t portray the police as evil, shadowy figures or one-dimensional villains, which might have been understandable given the circumstances. He is deliberately inclusive, choosing instead to focus more on how acts of protest can inspire and attract others into the fold, even celebrating the police contingent who joined the march in later years.

## Drawing inspiration from this mentor text

Consider how you could use some of the features of Gillespie’s text, such as the following, in your own writing.

- **Tell an anecdote:** If you’ve ever attended a protest in person or even contributed to a social justice movement online, you could tell your story. Explore why you were compelled to participate, your specific motivations and what you were trying to achieve. Set the scene, capture the atmosphere, quote the chants or banners and narrate the journey for your audience.

- **Write an essay:** Even if you've not been personally involved in a situation like Gillespie, consider yourself a historian, archivist or journalist researching a past protest and present these facts to an audience to inform them. You will need to source firsthand accounts, dates, quotes or statistics to use in your writing. Like Gillespie, you may wish to use subheadings or hyperlinks for additional readings or resources for your reader. Just because your piece is factual doesn't mean it needs to be devoid of passion or emotion. You can still use descriptive language and other devices to elevate the writing and immerse the reader in a different time period.
- **Link the past to the present:** Most protests are part of a larger social movement. Like Gillespie, consider exploring a protest of the past and connecting it with the present. You can keep the main focus on your chosen protest; however, you can broaden the scope to discuss those who came before you, and how your fight is a continuation of theirs. You could explore the progress that has been made but also the importance of maintaining the future fight and focusing on the work that still needs to be done.
- **Fictionalise protest:** You don't have to have participated in a march like this to write about it. You could create a character taking part in a famous protest from history. Consider a first-person narrative from a fictional or a real historical figure who participated in an anti-Vietnam War protest; a civil rights demonstration in China, South Africa or America; a rally for refugee rights; or a protest against the death penalty.

## Write about real-world protests

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What are some recent protests, demonstrations or marches that have occurred in public spaces? Alternatively, what are some important protests from twentieth-century history that you could source footage of?

- 1 Find some images or watch video recordings of these, taking notes on what you witness.
- 2 Using these ideas, try to employ descriptive language to immerse a reader in that moment. You may like to focus on the sights and sounds, the energy of the crowds, the speakers, the chants, the slogans and placards, or even the emotion and passion driving the participants.

# EXPLORING 'FREEDOM OR DEATH'

This section explores the second mentor text for Writing about protest: Emmeline Pankhurst's speech 'Freedom or death'.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read the speech.

## Overview

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) was a British activist who was a leader in the suffragette movement, advocating for women's right to vote. Throughout her career, she wrote speeches and published newsletters to raise awareness, embarked on hunger strikes and various demonstrations, and was arrested several times. Her efforts saw changes in British legislation yet it was not until 1928, just weeks after her death, that women were granted full voting rights in England. In 1999, *Time* magazine named Pankhurst one of the 100 'most influential people of the 20th century'.

Pankhurst's famous 'Freedom or death' speech was delivered on the steps of the Parsons Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut, in the United States on 13 November 1913. Although British, Pankhurst embarked on a speaking and fundraising tour of America in 1913 at the invitation of US suffragettes. The crowd consisted of both men and women: supporters, cynics and critics. While speaking, Pankhurst stood in front of a banner that read 'Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God'. The speech is considered one of the defining moments of the suffragette movement.

## Protest in 'Freedom or death'

Underpinning this protest and the entire suffragette movement was the lack of human rights afforded women, such as the rights to participate in public life, to express themselves freely and to have a representative government listen to their concerns. Pankhurst's address attempts to assert women's humanity with the 'very simple fact – that women are human beings' and to force men to see from a disenfranchised and dehumanised woman's perspective.

Despite her undeniable history of advocacy, Pankhurst opens her speech by stating that 'I do not come here as an advocate', acknowledging that 'American suffragists can do that very well for themselves'. Her opening words embolden and empower allies in her audience and set the tone for an assertive and resolute speech.

One of Pankhurst's strategies is to dismantle the stereotypes of women as submissive and weak by adopting a quality that men are very familiar with – militancy. Pankhurst asserts that she is here as a soldier 'who has temporarily left the field of battle in order to explain ... what civil war is like when civil war is waged by women'. Pankhurst sees protest as a battle and her speech serves as a war cry – the distinctive motivating shout given by soldiers as they approach enemy lines, intent on attacking and intimidating the opposition. Not interested in being polite, patient or submissive, Pankhurst suggests that she and, by extension, all women must be vocal in order to be heard. She understands that change needs to be forced, the status quo challenged and rights loudly advocated for. Politeness and submission will not facilitate the type of progress insisted upon.

As such, Pankhurst is more than willing to use violence as a form of protest. Her speech is littered with threats – some veiled, some explicit – that violence is needed and 'bloodshed' inevitable. This reinforces how protest is a risky and dangerous venture that often results in collateral damage. She also reminds her sisters in the struggle that sacrifice is needed to achieve the desired change. Giving the speech its title, she asserts that she is more than willing to die for her cause, declaring that 'if any life is to be sacrificed it shall be ours'. Through this, she is forcing the hand of her opposition and reminding her fellow soldiers of the need for resistance.

Hunger strikes were a common tactic used by those wishing to draw attention to their causes, and Pankhurst commits to continuing the practice as a means of resistance. Pankhurst also teases men present that they would not have the same fortitude: 'I think there are very few men today who would be prepared to adopt a "hunger strike" for any cause'. This statement is boldly provocative and further cements her determination. Imprisonment is another barrier hardly seen as an impediment by the suffragettes. No stranger to being jailed herself, Pankhurst reminds the audience that apprehending suffragettes 'didn't stop [them] at all'. Rather, being put 'in solitary confinement ... amongst the most degraded of criminals' was used to their advantage: 'It was valuable experience, and we were glad to get it.'

The suffragettes were not above resorting to sabotage to achieve their purpose. Pankhurst is almost boastful when reminding the audience that 'we entirely prevented stockbrokers in London from telegraphing' when 'women

got to the mains and cut the wires'. This brave act of sabotage 'proved to the authorities that weak women, suffrage women, as we are supposed to be, had enough ingenuity to create a situation of that kind'. Such strategies are seen by Pankhurst as justifiable and necessary civil disobedience, and she implies that they would do it all again, and possibly more: 'Now, I ask you, if women can do that, is there any limit to what we can do except the limit we put upon ourselves?'

Furthermore, Pankhurst explains to her audience that men would do the very same thing if they were in the same situation as women, and indeed have done so in the past. Using the hypothetical 'suppose the men of Hartford had a grievance ... what would the men of Hartford do then?' Pankhurst draws parallels with the men's 'forefathers' who acted when they 'couldn't wait any longer' and facilitated a revolution when their rights were being denied, thus advocating for the same tactics to be adopted by women.

Pankhurst also questions the validity of the current government. Her resistance logically suggests that women should not be subjected to laws and governance that they had no say in establishing. She warns that until that fundamental wrong is rectified, women need to refuse governmental control, stating firmly, 'We withhold our consent, we will not be governed any longer so long as that government is unjust.' Pankhurst's protest is a stark reminder that a democracy works only if everyone participates and everyone has equal opportunity to assert their needs.

## Context

At the time of Pankhurst's speech, the suffragette movement had gained crucial momentum in many countries. New Zealand and Australia had already given women the right to vote, many European countries were quick to follow and even some states within America had begun changing their laws to grant women suffrage. Yet in Pankhurst's home country and the majority of the world, women were still seen as second-class citizens.

Pankhurst mentions several recent developments in this crusade, such as the 'Cat and Mouse Act'. This 1913 piece of legislation was enacted by British Parliament to deal with the issue of hunger strikes by suffragettes and allowed authorities to imprison women and release them when their health deteriorated. These women were swiftly apprehended and returned to prison once their health recovered. The law was colloquially named as such to draw associations with cats who often tortured and played with mice before killing them. By assigning this law such a nickname, suffragettes were

highlighting the cruel tactics the government was resorting to in order to quash their protest.

The speech also includes several allusions and analogies throughout, such as the reference to 'your forefathers' who objected to unjust taxation when the American colonies were under British rule in 1773. In an event known as the Boston Tea Party, a group of American patriots threw hundreds of valuable chests of tea into Boston Harbour to protest British Parliament's Tea Act, which taxed imports to America. These citizens resented making payments to a government they had not elected. Although a symbolic act of resistance, it was vital in beginning the process of American independence from Great Britain.

Pankhurst also makes reference to Russian and Chinese revolutionaries, the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery to draw parallels with other important movements throughout the US and worldwide. This can be an effective strategy in your own writing in order to situate the protest you are focusing on within a historical tradition.

## Setting

The location of this iconic speech was America, specifically Hartford, Connecticut, at the turn of the century. While certainly a large city, Hartford was and still is dwarfed by more prominent, populous and cosmopolitan cities in the US. Pankhurst had previously spoken at both Madison Square Garden and Carnegie Hall in Manhattan, New York and was now taking her tour to smaller cities to expand her reach. In 'Freedom or death', Pankhurst deliberately tailors her speech to American citizens, making direct reference to their history, their political situation and their suffragettes. Taking into account the specific context in which your own writing might be published or broadcast will help to ensure that your language and ideas are crafted to best suit this setting or environment.

At this time, Pankhurst was a global figure also pitching her struggle as a universal one. Suffragette movements were advancing in many countries and Pankhurst was conscious that her message had a greater reach than simply those in attendance on 13 November 1913. By standing on the steps of a prominent theatre in Connecticut, Pankhurst is taking the space of the town crier to alert citizens to important news, standing upon the proverbial soapbox to speak directly to the population.

## Audience

Although speaking to citizens of Hartford, Pankhurst's appeals are pitched at the patriarchal powers that be – the men in positions of authority able to enact the changes she is demanding. She explicitly addresses all 'American men', imploring these everyday citizens to vote for changed legislature ('I come to ask you to help to win this fight'), while implicitly targeting the inhumane yet ineffectual tactics of political leaders ('no power on earth can govern a human being').

Pankhurst's speech also serves as inspiration to any American woman present and indeed all women worldwide on the cusp of receiving their rights. She proudly asserts that 'in the future it is going to be made easier for women all over the world to win their fight when their time comes'. Pankhurst's appeals also transcend class lines, which she makes note of by reminding the audience that 'we wear no mark; we belong to every class; we permeate every class of the community from the highest to the lowest'.

In your own writing about protest, consider the stakeholders in your particular protest and who has the power to change things. You can address your concerns directly to this audience and tailor your arguments and language appropriately. You can also consider multiple audiences, as Pankhurst does, simultaneously appealing to your adversaries while empowering and inspiring your allies. If you are writing a speech, it may help to visualise yourself making this speech. Where would it take place? Who would you be addressing?

## Purpose

Pankhurst's intention here is to argue for basic human rights. Her goal is to have her audience reflect on what's right and to challenge their misconceptions, criticisms or doubts, but ultimately to drive social and legislative change. She also works to inspire other women in their struggle to be heard, recognised and respected. If you are writing to argue, it is particularly important to have a clearly defined purpose, and to tailor your choices about ideas and language to that goal. You could also write your piece to address multiple purposes at once, just as Pankhurst does.

## Structure

Pankhurst begins her speech with a repeated focus on herself as an individual; 'I am' is repeated seven times in the first section. Once she has addressed her

audience and the purpose of her talk, she extends her focus to the collective 'we women'. Her arguments are fluent and connected. Even when drawing on historical references or her own experiences, she threads these strands together to create a coherent and compelling case and contextualises herself within the wider movement.

Much of the speech is framed around rebuttals that pre-empt the criticisms or counterattacks of her opponents. In this case, these are the men in power, representatives of the patriarchy of the day who denied women their basic human rights. The listing of the various obstacles and hardships women have endured helps her to build her argument. Pankhurst matter-of-factly relays these throughout her speech: 'they put us in prison at first', next the 'forcible feeding' and 'then came the legislation'. However, these methods weren't enough 'to make the women yield'. Even threats of violence were not sufficient to stop the suffragettes: 'you can kill that woman, but she escapes you then; you cannot govern her'. The repeated dismantling of these tactics gives much of the speech its shape and its momentum.

Pankhurst's speech can also be studied as the quintessential example of ethos/pathos/logos – a methodical series of appeals that work together to persuade.

- **Ethos:** Pankhurst proudly lists her credentials as a leader in the suffragette movement and demands respect for the rebellious and defiant actions she has already undertaken and will continue to undertake. She draws parallels with other revolutionaries and US Civil War heroes in order to associate herself with familiar stories of courage. In doing so, she establishes her authority, credibility and trustworthiness.
- **Pathos:** Appealing to emotion and sympathy from an audience is also evident in the speech. Pankhurst's carefully chosen words evoke sympathy for the women who have been ignored, imprisoned, force-fed or starved.
- **Logos:** Pankhurst appeals to the audience's reason by using irrefutable and logical arguments that support her case, for example, when she describes how women are simply adopting the same tactics that men have historically used when protesting, and when she asserts that women are entirely capable of waging wars.

The use of ethos, pathos and logos appeals can be very effective in argumentative writing, allowing you to influence the audience on multiple levels.

## Voice

What makes Pankhurst's speech so persuasive is her distinctive voice that is sustained throughout. Her determination and focus never wavers, as she commands respect and demands to be heard. This is all the more remarkable at a time when women were not encouraged to speak publicly and men in power were not used to being held to account by women.

Throughout her address, Pankhurst's tone is impressively forceful yet measured. Even when detailing frustrations and obstacles or when threatening aggressive and confrontational tactics, she remains cool and composed.

## Language

The most obvious of the language devices utilised by Pankhurst is the extended metaphor of war. The speech is littered with references to 'soldier[s]', 'militancy', 'the field of battle', 'warfare' and 'combatants'. By drawing these comparisons, Pankhurst is presenting her ideas through a prism that all are familiar with. Wars are often seen as necessary endeavours to force change, rectify wrongs and assert influence and power. By aligning her struggle with men in battle, Pankhurst demands the reverence given to those who sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Another metaphorical flourish employed in the speech is one of 'babies very hungry and wanting to be fed'. Instead of infantilising suffragettes, this technique reinforces the life-and-death urgency of their cause. She compares the noise being made by suffragettes to that of an 'impatient baby [who] cries lustily, screams and kicks and makes everybody unpleasant until it is fed'. This is revealed to be a tactical strategy, a demand to be heard and attended to. Although Pankhurst maintains a collected, measured stance here, the underlying threat is that she is prepared to kick and scream if necessary.

Pankhurst also draws upon the popular proverb 'you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs', suggesting that some force and mess is required to achieve a desired outcome. This imagery reminds all in attendance to brace themselves for any unpleasant yet necessary 'breaking' of the structures that restrict and oppress women.

In addition to these strategic language choices, Pankhurst's piece is further strengthened with familiar persuasive techniques such as anecdotes, repetition, appeals, rhetorical questions and calls to action.

## Characterisation

Although Pankhurst depicts herself as a 'soldier', she also spends time rebutting the mischaracterisations of her personality. She refutes claims that she is 'a dangerous person' and 'of no value to the community', and her speech serves to present herself on her own terms.

Along with her own self-portrait, she characterises all women as equally 'determined' and 'revolutionary'. Her fellow suffragettes are portrayed as strong and resolute rebels who are ingenious in their activism. She writes that 'their spirits are unquenched...their spirit is alive, and they mean to go on as long as life lasts'. Her categorisation, while a generalisation, challenges the stereotypes of passive, subordinate women.

Rather than establish an obvious them-and-us contrast between the entrenched powers and the newly empowered, Pankhurst highlights the similarities of both women and the American men who fought for independence from Britain in how they approach their battles. This serves to illustrate how courage and strength are not gender-specific. She refers to men generally in glowing terms, highlighting their successes in war and political reform, in order to draw connections and associations between their struggles and the suffragette movement. Endeavouring to humanise women, she resists dehumanising men, even referring to males back home in England as 'the dear men of my country'. In your own writing about protest it can be useful to place yourself, figuratively, in the shoes of people on various sides of the debate or issue. This will make your writing more rich and nuanced.

## Drawing inspiration from this mentor text

Consider how you could use some of the features of Pankhurst's text, such as the following, in your own writing.

- **Play with perspective:** You could start your protest with the personal, as Pankhurst does, referring to 'me' or 'I', and speaking anecdotally about your own experiences and what this issue means to you. Yet Pankhurst's focus moves to a wider context, referring to 'we', 'us' and 'our' – other suffragettes and allies working together to form a social movement. Like Pankhurst, you may want to move between specific personal experiences and broader political perspectives.
- **Appeal to ethos/pathos/logos:** With ethos, you state your credentials, expertise, experience or authority in terms of the topic. Pathos →

- is where you bring the emotion in, connecting to your audience's empathy or compassion. To further persuade, you then appeal to your audience's logic by rationally and reasonably presenting your arguments. Logos can also extend to listing all the arguments against your protest and systematically, one by one, rebutting, dismantling or destroying these with your own reasoning.
- **Use an extended metaphor:** To elevate your speech and prevent it being too literal, repetitive or dull, consider adopting a technique like Pankhurst's references to herself as a soldier. Although war is an effective parallel to a protest, you could also consider alternatives, for example, an endurance athlete climbing a mountain, a chef preparing a meal, a parent giving birth or an artist painting a masterpiece.
  - **Include allusions:** Draw parallels to other famous protests and social movements in your writing. Pankhurst refers to revolutionaries in Russia, China and the US to highlight similarities, so contemplate aligning your experiences and your battles with other successful conflicts.

### Consider women's rights activism today

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There are still many countries where women have fewer rights than men. Even in Australia, gender inequality is still prevalent. In 2022, the World Economic Forum ranked Australia 43rd (out of 146 countries) in terms of gender equality. There is still a considerable pay gap between men and women, and fewer women than men in leadership positions in both government and business. Women are also at greater risk of homelessness, domestic violence and sexual assault.

As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions:

- › If Pankhurst were alive today, what might she be fighting for?
- › What specific changes would she be aiming to achieve? Who would she be appealing to?
- › What would a Pankhurst speech for the #MeToo movement look like?

# EXPLORING 'HARRISON BERGERON'

This section explores the third mentor text for Writing about protest: Kurt Vonnegut's short story 'Harrison Bergeron'.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read the story.

## Overview

'Harrison Bergeron' is a dystopian short story by American writer Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007). Vonnegut wrote several novels, short stories, plays and nonfiction works over the span of a 50-year career, his most acclaimed novel being *Slaughterhouse-Five* from 1969. He achieved critical and commercial success with his satirical style and dark humour.

Vonnegut was an atheist and a humanist, often exploring ideas about social justice, the abuse of power and the onset of technology in his work. These ideas are evident in 'Harrison Bergeron', which was first published in 1961 in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The story was subsequently republished in Vonnegut's short story collection *Welcome to the Monkey House* in 1968. 'Harrison Bergeron' has been adapted for the screen several times.

## Protest in 'Harrison Bergeron'

Vonnegut's story focuses on the ridiculous lengths those in power will resort to in order to stamp out dissent. The characters live under totalitarian rule with 'unceasing vigilance' and absurd and grotesque tactics to keep people from being 'unfair' or 'competing'.

To suppress independent thought, the powerful mandate 'mental handicap radio[s]' for those of above average intelligence. These transmitters work as a kind of aversion therapy, to 'send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains'. The noises vary from 'somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer' to 'a rivetting gun'.

To further stamp out individuality or excellence, those strong enough to fight back are burdened with 'birdshot in a canvas bag', 'sashweights' or 'scrap metal'. The beautiful are forced to wear 'hideous' masks or 'a red

rubber ball for a nose' with 'eyebrows shaved off' and white teeth hidden 'with black caps at snaggle-tooth random', all of which are supposedly designed to make others feel better about themselves. Further deterrents to exceptionalism include fines and jail. At their worst, these totalitarian tactics result in live, televised executions that make a very public example out of rebels. As such, television is depicted as a tool of propaganda. The government uses this technology to transmit warnings yet also to sedate and pacify those watching at home.

Vonnegut questions, critiques and condemns government surveillance and interference with independent thought and action. His story serves as a warning about the dangers of unchecked power – especially for those governments who espouse equality yet limit freedoms to achieve their ends.

For the most part, these hideous tactics are successful. George and Hazel seem to take pride in their forced equality, even when it is clearly burdensome for them. Their compliance demonstrates how successful propaganda and fearmongering can be in stamping out criticism or dissent. George muses that without these torturous tactics 'we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?' Even Hazel, someone not prone to deep thinking, believes that 'it'd fall all apart' without such restraints. The brainwashing is seen to full effect when Hazel, fantasising about what she would do in the position of Handicapper General, is more fascinated with the nature of the earpiece sounds than with why they occur, let alone with abolishing them.

Although Vonnegut opens his story optimistically – 'nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else' – it quickly becomes apparent that this is a forced construct, a lie perpetrated by the powers that be. None of the characters are depicted as happy, despite thinking they are living in an egalitarian utopia.

At the heart of Vonnegut's chilling story is the human desire to express oneself and to resist excessive control. In the midst of this totalitarian nightmare, 'a living, breathing Harrison filled the screen' of the TV in his parents' house. He declares himself, in an outburst of bravado, 'a greater ruler than any man who ever lived' and dares to dance unencumbered, in a form of protest, ascending so high as 'to kiss the ceiling'. Harrison is proof that you cannot suppress the strong, the independent, the intelligent or the beautiful. His tale depicts the importance of dissent, even at great sacrifice and even if these risks are ultimately futile; it remains a vital part of the human condition to protest. It is important to note that in Vonnegut's story,

Harrison is only 14 – a child, and yet still expendable in the eyes of authorities and considered 'dangerous' for refusing to toe the line.

Although Vonnegut advocates taking pride in being an individual, another possible interpretation of his story could view Harrison as a narcissist masquerading as a freedom fighter. 'I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!' he announces, ironically adopting the same fascist and authoritative methods he is attempting to overthrow.

## Context

Vonnegut's short story was written in the 1960s, a period of much social, cultural and political change. After World War II, fascist regimes emerged and America was particularly fearful and suspicious about the rise of communism in various parts of the globe. Russia, North Korea and East Germany, among other countries, adopted mass surveillance and propaganda, restricted free speech and resorted to violence and terror in order to maintain power.

Although America saw itself as the upholder of freedom, the leaders of that country, too, have been accused of using authoritarian tactics on their adversaries and even their own citizens. Roughly a decade prior to 'Harrison Bergeron' being published, there was a series of televised anti-communist investigations known as the McCarthy hearings. These were essentially witch-hunts, that is, people were persecuted and publicly accused of being disloyal or rebellious without sufficient evidence. Over time, many Americans began realising these hearings were a major overstep of government power, targeting innocent civilians and instilling unnecessary panic and hysteria within society. Vonnegut was often critical of the US in his work, and 'Harrison Bergeron' can be read as an extension of this.

Mid-century America also saw the advent of new technologies, as evidenced by the earpieces worn by characters in the story, and television was becoming a mainstay in people's homes. Many sociologists and critics were concerned about the pervasiveness of television and how this new invention would change society. A powerful tool, the television screen had the potential to transmit information or disinformation and potentially turn audiences into passive, immobile recipients.

Aversion therapy was still considered a valid therapeutic technique in the 1960s to eliminate or reduce certain behaviours in people, especially alcoholism, drug addiction and homosexuality. To condition a patient to avoid certain patterns of behaviour, psychotherapists would sometimes use electrical shocks or other unpleasant stimuli so that patients would associate their

impulses with undesirable or even harmful consequences. This practice was later phased out or outlawed when it was deemed ineffective and unethical.

Vonnegut also refers to 'Amendments to the Constitution' at the beginning of his story. Written by America's founding fathers in 1787 to establish the framework of the US after it gained independence, the Constitution has been altered throughout the years to extend civil rights. At the time of writing the story in 1961, America had introduced 23 amendments (it is currently up to 27). Yet in Vonnegut's story, the government has fast-tracked 213 amendments. The suggestion here is that these changes are no longer occurring to safeguard freedoms and liberties, but rather to take them away.

## Setting

'Harrison Bergeron' is set in the United States in the year 2081. Vonnegut deliberately avoids mentioning the specific city or state his story takes place in, as well as the name of the ruling political party. As such, he's suggesting this could be set anywhere in America. Much of Vonnegut's work was set in the distant future of America or within the Western world.

Vonnegut was projecting 120 years ahead, depicting a futuristic world where technology has advanced but human rights have regressed. As in many dystopian stories, the characters are under the misconception that they are in fact living in a utopia. The story of the Bergerons is placed within an ordinary domestic setting, with a couple sitting innocuously in front of the television. Through this, Vonnegut contrasts the home, typically a safe and private space, with the intrusion of a tyrannical regime.

## Audience

Throughout his writing career, Kurt Vonnegut cultivated a large and devoted audience. Although often fans of science fiction or political satire, his readership was not restricted to any specific demographic. Vonnegut's stories are universal and his work has been reissued and translated numerous times. Yet it could be argued that Vonnegut was deliberately issuing a warning to citizens who live in free, democratic societies.

## Purpose

Vonnegut's writing is designed to express his thoughts, feelings and political ideologies in a creative manner. While his prose works to entertain and engage

on one level, it has the more important intent of positioning audiences to reflect on significant ideas. His stories often advocate for the importance of staying alert, and for questioning those in power and holding them to account. His ultimate aim is often to unsettle his audience and inspire dissent.

The overall purpose or moral of 'Harrison Bergeron' could be for readers to embrace what makes them unique, to celebrate human singularity and to throw off whatever figurative or literal shackles impede this. Vonnegut is essentially imploring his audiences not to unthinkingly accept the status quo, by portraying the risks of living among a population of passive and oblivious people.

## Structure

'Harrison Bergeron' follows a linear narrative, with a traditional structure of orientation and exposition, rising action, climax and denouement. Yet within this relatively straightforward manner of storytelling are layers of nuance and complexity.

The opening paragraph establishes that in 2081, 'everybody was finally equal'. Yet Vonnegut foreshadows or hints that things were far from utopian. To maintain this equality, 'vigilance' is needed and there is an ominous, foreboding suggestion that 'some things about living still weren't quite right'.

The story juxtaposes tragedy with ridiculous, almost comic, scenes. The simple, ordinary act of a couple watching television at home is contrasted with the absurd ways the powerful maintain their authority. The beauty and strength of those on the television screen, and Harrison specifically, sits in stark opposition to those suffering under tyranny.

## Voice

The story is told from the perspective of an omniscient and detached storyteller utilising a matter-of-fact style of narration. This use of the third person allows the reader to see the bigger picture, particularly vital given that characters such as George and Hazel are unable to.

Vonnegut employs a satirical tone and favours ordinary language to make a tragic and salient point amid the absurdity. His gift as a writer is his ability to explore complex and sophisticated ideas in simple, concise prose. Vonnegut's work as a journalist prepared him for distilling complicated content into writing that could be understood by anyone. Additionally, his dialogue is realistically conversational, permeated with mutterings of 'huh', 'gee' and

'yup'. The dialogue is appropriately colloquial, with Hazel of 'perfectly average intelligence' using everyday words and expressions such as 'reckon', 'boy!' and 'doozy'. Realistic conversational speech is key to developing authenticity and relatability in your own creative work.

## Language

Despite Vonnegut's unadorned writing style, his careful use of literary techniques elevates the story. The motif of noise is repeated throughout; although the characters react to it instinctively, they soon forget about it and are desensitised to the violent horrors before them. Gradually, the noises increase in intensity and ingenuity to ensure the intended impact is achieved. What begins as a 'buzzer' in George's ear becomes an 'earthquake' and then an 'automobile collision'. A 'twenty-one-gun salute' heard by George early on in the story serves to foreshadow his son's impending execution.

Other motifs Vonnegut uses are the absurd masks and weights worn by his characters – symbols of the oppression and submission in this dystopian society. The specific choice by Vonnegut to depict people weighed down by sashweights, scrap metal and birdshot (a type of ammunition) reminds readers that this totalitarian society is a violent police state. Without this government interference, citizens are able to soar – literally and metaphorically. The masks are enforced to cover up beauty and to equalise citizens by removing all uniqueness.

Possibly the most striking and haunting use of imagery in the story is that of the depictions of ballerinas attempting to dance while being weighted down. 'They weren't really very good', the narrator ironically reports, reflecting George's thoughts, although the narrator later refers to their innate strength and grace, noting that they are forced to wear 'handicap bags ... as big as those worn by two-hundred pound men' to counteract their natural abilities.

In depicting these punishing contraptions, Vonnegut uses different language devices to reinforce their impact. He uses alliteration with 'Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware', as well as repetition with 'nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else.' Vonnegut's use of simile accentuates the brainwashing of George, whose 'thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm'. In contrast, he reserves his most expressive and positive phrasing for the dancing between Harrison and his Empress ballerina, who 'reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun' and 'leaped like deer on the moon'.

Vonnegut's specific and purposeful character names also promote inference, connotation and allusion. Bergeron is a name of French origin, deriving from the term 'berger', meaning shepherd. Harrison's hijacking of the television studio is an attempt to herd and guide his fellow citizens to follow him. The ridiculously named character Diana Moon Glampers has a first and middle name that alludes to the ancient Roman goddess of the moon and hunt, while her made-up surname accentuates how ludicrous and insane her role in this regime is.

## Characterisation

In many ways, the Bergerons are depicted as a conventional couple, innocently sitting down in their living room to converse in front of the television. They are also tragic figures, whose child was taken away by authorities. George Bergeron is portrayed as someone burdened with intelligence 'way above normal' who nonetheless unsuccessfully 'tried to think', 'toying with the vague notion' that he could possess freedom of thought.

Hazel is presented as a contrast to her husband, with 'no mental handicap herself'. She even boasts of how ordinary she is: 'who knows better than I do what normal is?' Hazel is blissfully ignorant of the tactics used in the mental handicapping and even feels 'envious', wishing she could be subjected to it. She doesn't understand the sarcasm underpinning the expression 'you can say that again' – she literally does, humorously repeating herself.

Yet Vonnegut imbues both Bergerons with a spark of humanity. Worried about her husband's tiredness, Hazel suggests he lay down and take off some of his weights, boldly stating, 'I don't care if you're not equal to me for a while.' Both Hazel and George are portrayed as crying at different points in the story, suggesting that deep down they are aware of the loss of their child. Yet neither are able to remember why they are crying. These brief, tender moments are perhaps the most poignant parts of Vonnegut's story.

Harrison is deliberately introduced as a stark contrast to all the compliant characters. At just 14, his height and attractiveness make him a formidable and imposing force. Described as a 'genius and an athlete', he's clearly a threat to law and order and subjected to the harshest treatment: 'Nobody had ever born heavier handicaps.'

Vonnegut illustrates Harrison's gifts, not just in breaking out of jail and attempting a coup, but in his physical and personality traits. His movements are enacted with 'marvelous delicacy' and he is depicted as being appreciative of music. Also, in 'an explosion of joy and grace', he is able to 'neutral[ise]

gravity with love and pure will'. Although Harrison's physical prowess is certainly reinforced, Vonnegut is careful to infuse him not only with strength but also with beauty and poeticism.

## Drawing inspiration from this mentor text

Consider how you could use some of the features of Vonnegut's text, such as the following, in your own writing.

- **Capture a moment:** Many of the best short stories focus on one moment in time. It's difficult to consider a character's life story or a complex social movement in one short narrative, so consider focusing on a snapshot in time that reveals a lot about the importance of protest or the consequences of remaining silent.
- **Choose a narrator carefully:** You could narrate from the first-person perspective of someone living in a dystopian world. This deliberately subjective viewpoint means that the character may be unable to see the big picture. Alternatively, you could employ a third-person omniscient narrator who is able to see the more objective, wider context.
- **Build a dystopia:** Dystopian fiction often relies on common tropes you could consider incorporating.
  - › Propaganda is used to control, dehumanise and manipulate citizens, often deceiving them into thinking they exist in a utopia.
  - › Independent thought and freedoms are restricted, outlawed or discouraged.
  - › Technology has advanced but is often used by the government against its citizens, who are under constant surveillance.
- **Create a rebel:** Like the title character in Vonnegut's story, many dystopian narratives feature a protagonist who senses things are not right, who questions authority, and who feels trapped and longs to escape. They serve as the proxy for the reader and we inevitably identify with them and root for them in their struggles. This would be the perfect vehicle for you to portray protest in a dystopian world.

## Explore imagined worlds

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Vonnegut projected his society more than one hundred years into the future. What do you anticipate Australia will look like in one century?

- 1 First, consider a utopia. What is the best world scenario you can imagine? How would this society run? What role will technology play? What would good governance look like?
- 2 Now consider the flipside: a dystopian worst-case scenario, your own living hell where everything you value is taken away. How will technology be used then? What lengths would the government go to in order to maintain control? What would people be protesting and how would they be treated if they dared to dissent?

# EXPLORING THE MONOLOGUE FROM *CITY OF GOLD*

This section explores the fourth mentor text for Writing about protest: the monologue from Meyne Wyatt's play *City of Gold*.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to view Wyatt's performance of the monologue.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access a transcript of the monologue.

## Overview

Meyne Wyatt (born 1989) is a First Nations actor and writer, and a graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). He has performed on stage, on television and in films, in such projects as *Neighbours*, *The Sapphires* and *Mystery Road*.

Wyatt's monologue is taken from his 2019 play *City of Gold*. A television performance of the monologue went viral in June 2020 when it was aired on ABC's *Q+A* program in an episode that discussed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody. The play is partly inspired by Wyatt's own experiences and has been performed to critical acclaim across Australia since 2019. It focuses on Breythe Black, a Wongutha–Yamatji man who left Kalgoorlie in an attempt to launch an acting career, only to be called back home when his father dies. Wyatt's play is an exploration of how grief, culture and racism intersect to force a reckoning of identity and belonging. A revised edition of the play was published in 2022.

## Protest in the monologue

Wyatt's monologue is a deliberately confronting, urgent and powerful statement from an individual fed up with prejudice. The piece serves as a perfect

illustration of how the political is personal and how anger can be necessary to force change.

The opening line 'I'm always gonna be your *black* friend, aren't I?' explicitly refers to the stereotypical role of the obligatory sidekick: a person of colour only present to serve the white protagonist's story. Yet this rhetorical question also works on a broader, social level to refer to the figure of the tokenistic 'black friend' – not seen or appreciated as an individual but used for social currency. Wyatt also expresses how this phenomenon is evident in various contexts, including the workplace. The roles offered to an actor like Wyatt are tired, clichéd and even offensive caricatures of 'the angry one, the tracker, the drinker, the thief'. As such, Wyatt is calling out the confining and prejudicial ways that agents, producers, directors and, by extension, Australian audiences see First Nations actors. When not offered these roles, he's otherwise relegated to niche productions – 'the black show, the black play'. Although Wyatt doesn't object to 'reppin' his race on stage or screen, he highlights the hypocrisy that Anglo-Saxon actors are never labelled or limited by their race.

Casting First Nations performers in scant or perfunctory roles like these serves to make them seem one-dimensional or practically invisible. Adding insult to injury, it creates a feeling or impression that they are never cast on merit or for their unique gifts, but as 'some box to tick, part of some diversity angle'. What Wyatt is referencing here is being 'othered': the act of treating an individual or a group as different from and not belonging to the majority, in ways that stigmatise and negatively impact them. Therefore, his monologue serves as a plea to be seen as an individual, a stark reminder of basic human rights and decency to an audience who should not have to be reminded. Wyatt's frustration at having to point out these examples has left him exhausted.

His speech also challenges people who consider themselves 'progressive' and focuses on how well-meaning acts of inclusion are often ignorant, harmful and counterproductive. Wyatt acknowledges how little social progress has truly been made in Australia, drawing comparisons between the past and the present. Racism 'used to be in your face', he says, while now it's racial profiling or erasure: 'security guard following me ... walking up to the counter first being served, second or third or last ... hailing down a cab and watching it slow down to look at my face and then drive off'. These microaggressions, 'no matter how big, how small', can fester, and refusing to remain silent about them can make one a target. Yet the monologue advocates for still taking the risk to shed light on deeply ingrained systemic inequalities.

Wyatt's protestations set up a catch 22: if he objects, he's 'whingeing' or falling into the stereotype of 'the angry black'. Only passive, compliant 'quiet and humble' First Nations peoples are allowed to participate in the public

sphere, if they ‘shut up’ and ‘stay in [their] lane’. Wyatt provides these angry outbursts with more context, explaining that if he does occasionally erupt in anger, it’s ‘not because of that one time’ but ‘because of [his] whole life’. Therein lies the justification for these moments of exasperation and Wyatt’s motivation for writing the monologue; there is only so much a human being can endure and internalise before an inevitable reckoning.

Yet despite the perpetual and soul-destroying obstacles, the hypocrisy, double standards and ignorance faced on a daily basis, Wyatt remains determined. His protest ends with ‘silence is violence. Complacency is complicity’. This culminates in Wyatt’s call to action and his championing the importance of protest. Directly addressing his community, he proudly insists, ‘never trade your authenticity for approval’ and requests that people ‘call ... out’ racism.

## Context

Despite claims of social progress, people of colour are still forced to highlight inequalities, educate others and demand equality. First Nations peoples particularly have endured unspeakable discrimination, oppression and violence since the British colonisation of Australia. Wyatt’s mention of being considered ‘flora and fauna before 1967’ is a reference to an Australian referendum that asked citizens to vote on whether First Nations peoples should be counted as part of the population. Before the successful ‘Yes’ vote, some perceived First Nations peoples as part of the native wildlife, not equal citizens worthy of consideration. Even though there have been changes to the Constitution and other laws, First Nations peoples are still considered second-class citizens by many, and still suffer disproportionate rates of incarceration, deaths in custody and poor health outcomes.

Australian Rules footballer Adam Goodes is mentioned twice in the monologue. Although a recipient of the Australian of the Year Award and dual winner of the Brownlow Medal, Goodes experienced systematic and repetitive harassment during his time on the sporting field. In one incident he was called an ‘ape’ by a young spectator, who was ejected from the stadium. Despite his measured response to the incident, rather than being praised for encouraging a ‘learning moment’ for the spectator and wider society, Goodes experienced a severe backlash, enduring repeated booing from football fans each time he played.

It is important to note that when Wyatt’s monologue was broadcast on television, America was in the midst of the Black Lives Matter protest movement.

This stemmed from the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of unarmed African-American teenager Trayvon Martin in 2013. The Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum in subsequent years after continued incidents of police brutality against people of colour that took the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Tamir Rice, among many others.

This in turn shed light on similar atrocities and inequalities in Australia and prompted protests in major Australian cities that saw thousands of people taking to the streets to demand change, even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The episode of *Q+A* in which Wyatt performed the monologue focused on recent cases of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody in Australia and the wider issues of prejudice, discrimination and inequality.

## Setting

Wyatt's protagonist in *City of Gold* has left Kalgoorlie to work on the east coast of Australia in the arts, only to return to his Country at a time when his emotions are at their most raw. Yet part of the reason Wyatt's performance of the monologue on television went viral is that the piece works just as effectively out of context. Whether delivered by a fictional character at home with his family in Kalgoorlie, a First Nations actor on the theatre stage or an activist before a TV camera, Wyatt's words are equally vital, compelling and relevant. In this moment, Wyatt/Breythe is taking the soapbox in the public square, the town crier holding up a mirror to society and reflecting back an ugly truth.

If you choose to create a monologue or dialogue that could be part of a longer script, ensure that your piece works as a standalone text, as Wyatt's does.

## Audience

Wyatt's monologue was first written to be performed to Australian theatregoers. This extract was performed and broadcast on television, with video footage of it exploding on social media in the days and weeks after. Its message resonated with a far broader audience than any theatre audience.

The writing is purposefully confrontational, using the repetition of 'you' and 'your' to directly address white Australian audiences and force them to reflect upon their own complicity in these injustices. The audience here takes the role of the ignorant, the apathetic, the oppressor and even the racist. The text is deliberately unsettling, provoking listeners to question whether they

are part of the problem or the solution. Even those considered a ‘friend’ have some introspection and reassessing to do. Wyatt highlights major differences between white and First Nations Australians when he states, ‘you go to weddings, we go to funerals’.

In the denouement of the monologue, Wyatt shifts his focus to other First Nations people who no doubt relate to his anger and see themselves within his anecdotes. The concluding lines are targeted to others experiencing the same hostility, discrimination and ignorance, imploring them to stay vigilant and vocal.

## Purpose

The purpose of the monologue is to express the injustices and violence that people of colour, particularly First Nations peoples, have had forced upon them. Wyatt’s intention is to raise awareness and visibility, particularly for the marginalised, ignored or oppressed.

Underpinning this is a passionate appeal for white Australians to reflect on their own behaviours and actions, conscious or otherwise. His protest demands others see the uncomfortable truths and patterns that have shaped Australia.

## Structure

Monologues are designed to capture the inner dialogue and thought processes of an individual in real time. As such, they can often be somewhat free-flowing and performed in a stream-of-consciousness manner. Wyatt’s monologue, however, is laser sharp in its focus and maintains its clear purpose, despite moving through various tangents and reference points.

What gives Wyatt’s monologue its framework is the repetition of all the criticisms, barriers and injustices he boldly calls out. Throughout the monologue he is in dialogue with his antagonists, both paraphrasing and explicitly quoting them. The piece is essentially a list of obstacles, grievances and ignorant questions that the character/author has endured, with historical and contemporary references that place this lived experience into a wider context.

Like many persuasive texts, the monologue shifts from problem to solution, concluding with a call to action and a purposefully spectacular refusal that wraps the piece up effectively and powerfully. Wyatt ends with the triad ‘I don’t want to be quiet. I don’t want to be humble. I don’t want to sit down’,

which builds in intensity to express his rejection of current injustices and systemic inequalities.

## Voice

Wyatt's passion, frustration and indignance is palpable throughout as the character/actor/activist refuses to be dutiful, polite or delicate. It is genuine and raw, putting necessary civil disobedience into words.

The monologue contains various subtle tonal shifts, from aggressive and defiant to inspirational, as the character speaks from the heart as well as the head. Mostly casual, conversational and colloquial by design, Wyatt's voice is authentic and realistic. This can be seen in the use of derogatory language to illustrate the uncomfortable reality of racism in Australia ('black dog', 'coon', 'boong', 'flog') and Wyatt's frustration and fury accentuated with the repetition of the expletive 'shit', used sixteen times throughout the short monologue.

LANGUAGE NOTE: The terms quoted above are racist words that have been used in the Australian vernacular to cause harm to First Nations peoples. Wyatt has drawn on this explicit language to directly reference this hurt, which, as the VCAA notes, 'serves to contextualise Wyatt's frustration and is not gratuitous in nature'.

There are deliberate pauses for effect and line breaks that provide emphasis and urgency, creating a cadence and rhythm more akin to slam poetry than a traditional monologue.

## Language

The monologue opens with a rhetorical question, 'I'm always gonna be your black friend, aren't I?', and repeats this technique throughout: 'Calling a black fella an ape? ... Didn't like that? ... And he's supposed to sit there and take it?' The questions are sometimes left hanging, dangled in front of the audience for them to confront and solve. Many of these questions are the provocations Wyatt experiences daily, for example, 'what are you whingeing for?' and 'how are we to move forward if we dwell on the past?' However, some of these questions are indeed answered or replied to – a literary device known as hypophora.

Wyatt favours repetition to reinforce the microaggressions and aggravations that build and fester in his work and life: 'I'm always in the black show, the black play. I'm always the angry one, the tracker, the drinker, the thief.' Furthermore, he uses the motif of being forced to 'be quiet and humble' and to 'sit down' to further highlight the oppressive and unjust social expectations First Nations peoples are subjected to. The final line, 'I don't want to sit down', is an allusion to the hit song 'Humble.' by Kendrick Lamar. Wyatt subverts the meaning of Lamar's rap – which was written to confront his ego – and adapts the lyrics into a bold declaration of defiance.

The penultimate passage of the monologue hammers home a call to action, arguing that 'silence is violence. Complacency is complicity'. The use of rhyme and near rhyme, as well as alliteration, brings the piece to its conclusion in a memorable and compelling way.

## Characterisation

Meyne Wyatt as Breythe Black seizes the spotlight in this moment and draws on unique personal experiences, as demonstrated through the use of the personal pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'my'. As the monologue progresses, the perspective gives way to 'we', 'us' and 'our', giving voice to countless others who have undoubtedly experienced the same or similar aggravations.

Breyne is characterised explicitly as 'exhaust[ed]' yet more implicitly as resolute, maintaining pride in the face of perpetual injustice. 'Be crazy, take a risk' and 'offend', he implores his audience, which portrays him as an activist hoping to inspire radical change. Through this character, Wyatt both challenges and perpetuates the label of the 'angry black' to justify this anger, recognising the paradox of doing so. If he speaks out, then society criticises him for upholding negative stereotypes, yet if he doesn't, then society isn't prompted to question or deconstruct these stereotypes.

## Drawing inspiration from this mentor text

Consider how you could use some of the features of Wyatt's text, such as the following, in your own writing.

- **Develop an emotional voice:** The more passionate you are, the more engaged the audience and the more persuasive and convincing the argument. Infuse your writing with a tone that encapsulates how you genuinely feel, whether that's angry, outraged, sad or some other emotion. Although your text will be read and assessed as a piece

of writing, if you are writing a monologue then consider performing it as part of your writing process. You could deliver it to a chosen audience, gauging their responses or asking for explicit feedback. Alternatively, you could record yourself speaking to hear how your emotions come across and where you might be able to make improvements.

- **Adopt a persona:** Wyatt's monologue is from the perspective of a fictional character in a play. Your protest does not need to be your personal struggle. You could create a persona, an alias or a pseudonym that is a fictionalised version of yourself. Alternatively, you could create an entirely fictional character. This could be a writer/speaker who is standing up to contemporary society or even a historical figure protesting about a past struggle.
- **Structure your ideas:** Monologues allow you to write in a more unfiltered, conversational and colloquial way, like everyday speech. Yet your piece still needs some structure, so consider framing your protest around criticisms, barriers and the everyday aggressions that you face in your life. Like Wyatt, you could begin with the problem and build to a solution or a call to action.
- **Use a range of literary techniques:** Although this piece is mostly written in casual language, including slang and curse words, other purposeful devices elevate the writing. The repetition of rhetorical questions can engage an audience and confront them directly with your arguments. Consider using alliteration and rhyming to emphasise key points, or allusions to recent social and cultural events to show a wider context.

## Explore personal protest

Brainstorm a list of grievances you have – perhaps about the way you've been treated, the disadvantages or discrimination you've experienced, the aggravations and microaggressions you've experienced daily. Perhaps you've been frustrated with the way people see, treat, judge or stereotype you. This judgement could come from a specific individual or group – peers, teachers, parents etc. – or from society in general. Like in Wyatt's piece, consider turning these grievances back on the culprits, to defend yourself and argue for better treatment. You could even use his opening line as a springboard – 'I'm always going to be ... aren't I?'

# CREATING YOUR OWN WRITING ABOUT PROTEST

In the Framework of Ideas, the VCAA elaborates on the idea of ‘Writing about protest’:

Explorations of conflict and contest, what it means to protest, the value of protest, the outcomes of protest, personal stories of protest, struggle and war.

Students could explore established figures like Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks and Vida Goldstein, marginalised figures like Pemulwuy and Claudette Colvin, and figures and movements like Greta Thunberg and the BLM protests. Events like massacres in Australia and the Frontier Wars could be explored as expressions of protest – and the attendant tragedy. There could also be explorations of the success and failure of protest – and the prescient protests that gained ground after the original protest had faded. Students could consider individual protest and group protest.

Essentially, what you’re being asked to do here is to put protest into words: the passion behind protest, the power of protest, the inevitable politics of protest. You might draw on existing historical contexts and movements, or create your own characters and world. The type of protest you write about can be small, personal and unique to your experiences, or something more far-reaching that plays out on a social or global level.

You need to show an understanding of protest and an ability to generate your own ideas, develop your voice and employ appropriate language features for your audience, purpose and context.

Your piece should be underpinned by three vital p’s: a clear **protest** (what, precisely, are you objecting to?), the **purpose** of your piece (what are you trying to achieve here? How will this dictate form, audience and language?) and, above all, **passion** (how will you use your distinct voice to communicate your experiences, beliefs or emotions?).

## Generating ideas

If you are overwhelmed by the task at hand or have no idea of where to begin, simply start by thinking about your world. What are you passionate about? More specifically, what makes you angry or upset? The best pieces capture that passion in words and harness it in a clear and constructive manner.

You don't need to be aligned with a global social justice movement in order to protest or to succeed at this task. The act of protesting is simply to take a stand and object to something. This could mean opposing certain rules, perceptions or expectations, or challenging someone, be it a peer, a parent or a teacher. If you wish to cast the net a little wider, what do you think needs changing in your community? In your world or the wider world?

Use the below table to help you generate some ideas for writing about protest.

Prompts	Notes
What does the word 'protest' mean to you? What do you imagine when you hear the word?	· · · ·
Why is protesting important? What are the consequences of doing nothing or staying silent?	· · ·
Have you ever been personally discriminated against, stereotyped or misjudged? Have you faced any unjust obstacles in your life? When, how and why?	· · · · · ·
Have you ever pushed back on this? Have you previously stood up for yourself? How?	· · ·
What makes you angry or sad about the world today?	· · ·
Who do you think are the most ignored, marginalised or mistreated people in your community? Why is this? What needs to be done about it?	· · · · · ·





If you could change one thing about the way society or the world is run, what would it be?	
Have you ever publicly protested in the past? Have you taken a stand or objected to something? What motivated you?	
Who inspires you? Are there any political leaders or activists who appeal to you? What do they stand for? Why are they so effective?	
What is the best way to appeal to others and get them on board? What emotions do you need to appeal to?	

There are many noble causes, movements and social justice pursuits worthy of exploration but it would be best to narrow your focus to just one. Attempting to cover a variety of different protests may run the risk of skimming over them and being too superficial. Any protest is inevitably complex and deserves a thorough exploration.

## Working with stimulus material

Another way to get started is to use a stimulus. Other people's quotations can sometimes help expand your thinking about protest. Use the following quotes to start brainstorming some ideas. What is the idea behind this statement? What does it make you think about? How can this idea be applied to different protests? It may help to research who the quote is attributed to – what was occurring in their lives that prompted this response? Can these ideas be incorporated into your own writing somehow?

- 'Vox populi, vox Dei' (the voice of the people is the voice of God) – Latin phrase
- 'Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty.' – naturalist and writer Henry David Thoreau
- 'Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence.' – artist Leonardo da Vinci

- ‘The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.’ – scientist Albert Einstein
- ‘One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.’ – civil rights activist Reverend Martin Luther King Jr
- ‘We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.’ – Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel
- ‘I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.’ – political activist Angela Davis
- ‘Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.’ – writer and activist James Baldwin
- ‘I raise up my voice – not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.’ – activist Malala Yousafzai
- ‘Whatever it takes to live and stand / ‘Cause nobody else’ll give a damn / So we live like caged beasts / Waitin’ for the day to let the rage free / Still me, ‘til they kill me / I love it when they fear me’ – rapper Tupac Shakur

You might also find inspiration and ideas in images, such as the following.





## Drawing from history

If you're struggling to refine your focus, start by researching the lives and actions of one of the following individuals or groups from history.

- Anti-fascist protesters like Sophie Scholl and the White Rose, student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, Pussy Riot and other Antifa movements
- Civil rights icons such as Rosa Parks, Claudette Colvin, Recy Taylor, Emmett Till, the Scottsboro Boys, the Freedom Riders, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers
- Black Lives Matter stories about Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Trayvon Martin and Breonna Taylor
- Australian protests such as the Eureka Stockade, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and resistance stories from Australia's Frontier Wars
- Suffragettes and second-wave feminists such as Vida Goldstein, Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, Dorothy Pittman Hughes and Shirley Chisholm
- First Nations rights activists like Pemulwuy, Charles Perkins, Vincent Lingiari, Marcia Langton, Adam Goodes and Australia's Freedom Riders
- Environmentalists like Greta Thunberg, Bob Brown, Al Gore, Jane Goodall and Rachel Carson
- Third-wave feminists and #MeToo activists like Tarana Burke, Ashley Judd and Rose McGowan
- Fat acceptance activists like Lindy West and Roxanne Gay
- Queer activists like Harvey Milk, Edie Windsor, the Stonewall rioters and ACT UP members
- Disability activists like Dylan Alcott, Stella Young and Judy Heumann

## Drawing from your life / your world

If you prefer to write from a personal experience, consider the concerns and rights of students such as yourself. Young people are traditionally patronised and disenfranchised and are not encouraged to participate in the political world until they reach adulthood. As such, their needs, wants and voices are often ignored. Your piece could advocate for better representations of the young, homing in on specific changes that would ensure fairness and equality for your peers and contemporaries.

## Asking probing questions

Once you've narrowed down the focus of your protest, start researching the underlying causes – there will undoubtedly be many.

- Why is this protest necessary?
- What led us here? What were the contributing factors?
- Is this a recent issue or a continuation of an ongoing protest?
- Who else is fighting for this cause? How can they serve as inspiration?
- What else can you learn from history and other examples of protest?
- Who holds the power to change things?

As challenging as it can be, try and look at the issue from the opposite end of the spectrum, from the point of view of those you're opposing. This will show a broader understanding of your issue.

- Who disagrees with you on this matter?
- Why are people standing in the way of this change?
- What is motivating these people? Is it power? Fear? A desire to protect the status quo? Ignorance? Something else?

Consider what you want to happen, and how it might occur.

- What are the solutions you are proposing?
- Who needs to come on board here?
- What is your call to action?
- Are there tangible, practical suggestions you could propose?
- What are the consequences of inaction? What exactly is at stake here?

# Planning your text

This section presents advice about aspects to consider before writing your own original text.

## Purpose and form

The VCE Study Design has helped narrow the purpose of your writing into four different verbs to underpin why you are putting pen to paper. Your purpose could be to express, explain, reflect or argue. Although there are not firm rules, many forms and styles of writing naturally align with particular goals and aims. The text types listed here are not exhaustive.

Purpose	Overview	Possible text types
To express	Writing to express is about conveying emotions, feelings or ideas. It can be a deeply personal process, often capturing an individual's unique voice, thoughts and experiences.	Short story, internal monologue or soliloquy, poem / series of poems, song lyrics, blog post, play script, scene from a TV/film screenplay, diary or journal entry
To explain	Writing to explain aims to provide information, clarify concepts or describe processes. This type of writing is typically informative and educational, helping readers gain a better understanding of a topic or an issue.	Podcast script, blog post, news article, feature article, infographic, speech, opinion piece, letter to the editor, expository essay, transcript of an interview
To reflect	Writing to reflect involves examining and exploring one's own experiences, thoughts or beliefs. This type of writing encourages self-awareness and personal growth, as well as providing insight into the human condition.	Personal essay, diary or journal entry, memoir, reflective podcast, blog post, letter, opinion piece, documentary script, internal monologue or soliloquy
To argue	Writing to argue involves presenting a point of view, supporting it with evidence and persuading readers to agree with or favourably consider your perspective. This purpose often requires critical thinking, analysis and logical reasoning.	Speech, open letter, opinion piece, letter to the editor, debate transcript, blog post, podcast script, feature article, persuasive essay, transcript of an interview

When deciding on the best form to write in, consider your strengths as a writer, as well as which purpose or purposes you feel confident focusing on and feel you could execute successfully.

Remember, too, that an effective text often fulfils more than one purpose. Hybrid writing blends two or more purposes, resulting in a text that is rich, complex and engaging. For example, a personal recount of your own unique experiences would undoubtedly **reflect** on the past, looking back on what you experienced, how you felt and what you learned. You could **express** this through descriptive language or even **argue** that your experiences should serve as a catalyst for change.

As you work on your own creations, don't be afraid to experiment with texts that aim to achieve multiple purposes and draw on the features of more than one text type. This can be a powerful way to explore and express several layers of meaning, making your text more dynamic and compelling.

## Audience

Inextricably linked to the idea of purpose is that of audience, or who you are writing for (beyond just your teacher or assessor!). This could be a broad range of people (for example, 'anyone who has experienced similar hardships in their life' or 'anyone who is unaware of this issue') or a specific demographic within the community (voters, educators, elected officials, parents, peers etc.). Having an audience in mind will help shape your ideas. It may help to actually visualise people reading your work and to pitch your appeals directly to them.

You may be appealing to an audience who needs to be educated, who you're attempting to convince of something. Yet your piece could just as easily 'preach to the converted', addressing those who already agree with you. The piece may serve to validate them, and to further inspire and motivate them to continue doing what they're doing.

When planning form, purpose and audience, consider what you want your readers to feel and think. What change are you seeking? What do you want them to take away from your piece?

Even if nobody is to read your piece (other than your teacher or assessor), consider where this text would best be read or heard, even hypothetically. The context for your text will lead you naturally to think about the likely audience. Here are some potential ideas.

- The stage of a public protest
- A school assembly
- A school or daily newsletter
- A social media platform



- • A news or current affairs website or television show
- A YouTube or TikTok account
- A short story collection
- An Australian cinema or theatre
- A televised debate
- A pamphlet to be distributed
- A podcast streaming service

## Consider text types

To consolidate your understanding further, consider the hypothetical text types below. Identify which purpose each aims to fulfil (it might be more than one), and a likely target audience for each.

	Purpose	Audience
An opinion piece for a daily newspaper about transgender rights in sport		
A speech made at your school assembly about new environmental proposals		
A memoir about childhood experiences of discrimination or stereotyping		
A creative story about protesters in Nazi Germany or within another totalitarian regime		
A monologue from a woman experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace		
A podcast script about disability rights		
A scene from a play about climate change refugees		
A debate about changing the date of Australia Day		

## Structure

Regardless of form, audience or purpose, you want to create a cohesive, fluent piece with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Many fictional narratives follow a similar general structure, although there are writers who experiment with this by deliberately not resolving all their plot threads or by presenting a twist or cliffhanger. Generally speaking, however, most fictional texts include the following structural elements.

- **Orientation and exposition:** The reader needs to be given just enough information to engage them and immerse them in your world.
- **Rising action:** Most stories are shaped around a conflict that the characters are called to respond to.
- **Climax:** Ideally, your narrative builds to an engrossing high point that forces a reckoning.
- **Falling action:** Often, a series of events result from the main conflict being addressed.
- **Denouement:** Some sort of clear resolution is reached.

A reflective piece could easily mirror this structure of orientation, exposition, rising action, climax and resolution. It could be framed around an older version of yourself or a persona who is looking back on the past. You may wish to connect the past with the present by ending with a focus on what has changed, what you've learned and where you're heading next.

A more informative, explanatory piece requires a broad overview or thesis statement followed by a logical sequencing where you provide background information. This can follow a cause-and-effect structure with consequential explanations. You may already be familiar with the conventional structure for analytical writing that has a clear introduction and body paragraphs in which topic sentences are followed by evidence and elaboration.

A piece that argues or persuades may follow the classic ethos/pathos/logos structure. If you foresee your text being published in a daily newspaper, you may wish to use a headline and subheadings. The lead paragraph often succinctly summarises the who, what, where, when and why, and the subsequent paragraphs provide further details, elaboration and insight.

## Voice and language

Your voice is unique to you. Your challenge is to distil that distinctiveness into your writing to create a piece that is original and genuine. Ideally, your piece still 'sounds' like you, even if it may be a more elevated, sophisticated or poetic version of your voice.

Once you've selected your form, purpose and audience, consider the level of formality that would be the most appropriate. Consider also the tone of your piece. What emotion do you wish to convey in your writing? What do you want your reader to feel? What word choices will best capture this mood or feeling?

- A **reflective** piece may work with a more casual, conversational or even colloquial style. Your word choices can be a little more informal and personal. You may like to adopt a considering or contemplative tone. →

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- An **explanatory** piece may require a more formal approach, with considered word choices that demonstrate your expertise and authority on the matter. Your voice will likely be factual, informative and expository.
  - If your purpose is to **argue**, consider which persuasive techniques would best serve your arguments. These kinds of texts focus on presenting a sustained point of view and use reason and logic to sway others to share this view.
  - An **expressive** piece should rely on purposeful descriptive language that could be elevated by devices such as imagery, metaphors, similes or personification. Your voice should be original and creative, and you may consider poetic language features such as repetition or rhyme. You also have the choice of first-, second- or third-person narration (first person is subjective by design, while third person is usually more detached and objective).



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access two ideas for drafting original texts about protest.

## Opening lines

Your first sentence is crucial. Regardless of which protest, form, audience or purpose you've chosen, you need to ensure your first sentence engages and hooks the reader, establishes voice and tone, and gives a hint about where your piece is heading.

Consider some of these opening lines from famous narratives and why they are so effective.

- 'Here is a small fact: You are going to die.' – *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- 'If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book. In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle.' – *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket
- 'Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.' – *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling

- ‘This morning Rino telephoned. I thought he wanted money again and I was ready to say no. But that was not the reason for his phone call: his mother was gone.’ – *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante

All of these successfully engage the reader and compel them to keep reading. Start brainstorming catchy, effective or unique ways to begin your piece.

Although you may wish to follow a traditional linear structure of beginning, middle then ending, one way to hook your reader is to consider starting at the climax or the end of your storyline and then work backwards.

Other ways to begin your piece include the following.

- **Start with a main contention:** ‘I can’t stand it one second longer. The time to speak up is right now. Our sports club’s selection policies are discriminatory and they need to change.’
- **Begin with dialogue or a quotation:** ‘If you have something to say of any worth then people will listen to you,’ the famous jazz pianist Oscar Peterson once said.
- **Start with something that provokes a protest:** ‘Who let your kind into this country? We grew here – YOU flew here!’
- **Begin with a memory:** ‘I remember the burning sensation as my cheeks flushed with rage. Swinging on the playground swings during recess on my first day of prep – a day that should have been an exciting new chapter in my short life, yet there I was, face-to-face with a menacing bully ...’
- **Begin by setting the scene:** ‘It was one of those strange summer evenings when the sky was about to burst with a welcome cool change, grey clouds stirring, lurking, rumbling ...’

All of these could serve as a springboard for a wider discussion or exploration that will unfold over the coming paragraphs. You can now start drafting the rest of your piece.

## Drafting, editing and finishing your work

Once you have a plan, it’s time to begin writing your piece. Drafting is an essential step in the writing process that allows you to explore your ideas, refine your message and create a coherent structure. Pay attention to your language choices, tone, use of transitions, overarching structure and other important features of your chosen text form. Once you’re happy with your written piece, you’ll then need to edit and proofread the content to get it into the best shape possible.

## Drafting and redrafting

The process of drafting and redrafting is very personal, and there are no right or wrong ways to do it. You should try various methods to make sure you find what suits you best.

Some people draft and edit carefully as they write, working very slowly to construct sentences and paragraphs that are complete and need only proofreading for minor details at the final stage. Others work more quickly initially, jotting down ideas and thoughts as they come, but then spend longer at the editing stage to shape the notes or drafts into cohesive sentences and complete pieces of writing.

Whichever way you work, you should always try to give yourself time and space during the process so that you can step away and come back to your writing with fresh eyes.

General tips for the writing and drafting process include the following.

- **Break the process into manageable chunks:** Drafting can feel overwhelming, especially for longer pieces. To make the process more manageable, break your writing into smaller parts or tasks, such as completing a specific section, writing a certain number of words or addressing a particular argument. This will help you stay focused and maintain momentum.
- **Write notes:** Keep a notebook beside you or a separate notes document open on your computer as you work, and use it to jot down anything that comes to mind that might interrupt the flow of your writing. These may include ideas you want to follow up on later in your piece, quotes you want to refer back to, or even items for your grocery shopping list!
- **Save your work:** If you work digitally (writing straight onto a computer rather than writing the first drafts by hand), it is worth saving multiple versions of your document as you go. Use a logical file naming system that makes sense for you, and don't simply continue saving changes to a single document. Sometimes you may want to return to ideas or content that you wrote earlier in your drafting and if you don't save new versions, you may lose valuable work that you previously deleted.
- **Work on tricky sections separately:** If you want to make significant changes or rewrite a sentence or paragraph, copy and paste it into an empty document. This will allow you to work on it without the distraction of the surrounding paragraphs, and without any concerns

about getting tangled or accidentally deleting something important. Then, when you are happy with the changes, you can copy and paste it back into your main document.

- **Keep focused:** If you need to, turn off your phone and even disconnect your computer from the internet for short periods while writing (you can use your notes page to jot down relevant things that you want to google later, so you don't get distracted by doing it in the middle of your writing period).
- **Take breaks:** If you get stuck with what you are writing, try to move to a different section of your piece then come back later, rather than getting bogged down on something that isn't working. Alternatively, you can give yourself a quick break by trying one of the writing exercises in the previous sections.
- **Seek feedback and revise as needed:** As you work through your draft, don't be afraid to share it with others for feedback. This can help you identify areas that need improvement, and it can also provide valuable insights and perspectives that you might not have considered. Be open to constructive criticism and be prepared to revise your draft based on the feedback you receive. Remember that drafting is an ongoing process, and it's essential to be flexible and adaptable as you refine your work.

## Editing and proofreading

Once you have finished your piece, it's time to edit and proofread it. At this point it can be very useful to take a break, because when you are too close to your work (for example, if you have now read and re-read it a million times and have been working on it for hours or days in a row), it is almost impossible to spot errors. This is because when you read, your brain will see what you expect to see or what you intended to write, not necessarily what is actually on the page. Ideally you would have days or even weeks between writing and editing, but obviously this is not always practical. If you are pushed for time, even a few hours in between is better than nothing, and will increase how effectively you are able to edit.

If possible, get a classmate or friend to give your work an edit, as they will be far more likely to spot errors, inconsistencies or issues. (You may want to do this with someone not working on the same assignment as you.) Make a clear arrangement about what they will be doing for you and what they are not expected to do. You may not always agree with feedback, and you may or may not make changes in response (remember that feedback can always be

subjective). But it is important to take on board any issues raised – your editor is your reader, and they are giving you information about how well your writing is working from an external perspective.

Below are some questions you may want to ask, in order to get feedback that is useful. Let your partner know how you would like them to provide the feedback. For example, you might give them a printed copy and ask them to make notes and highlight or underline parts; you might prefer digital mark-ups; you might like them to read the work and then have a face-to-face conversation so that you can discuss questions.

Potential questions for peer editors include the following.

- Is there any way the opening of my piece could be more engaging?
- Is there anything about my piece that is unclear (such as a confusing turn in the argument, events that don't make sense, characters who don't fit the context etc.)?
- Are there any inconsistencies you noted? (This might apply to the argument, narrative point of view, use of certain terms, fonts and headings, features of characters such as age etc.)
- Are there any points in the piece that felt jarring? (This could be a change in the line of argument, a change in perspective, a particular piece of dialogue or imagery, an awkward sentence etc.)
- Can you identify the purpose of my piece?
- Can you summarise my main argument?
- How would you describe the tone of my piece?
- Is it clear how my piece addresses the key topic/idea?
- Is there anything you felt could be left out?
- Is there any part you would have liked to see more of?
- Is my ending satisfying?

You might also have specific questions about anything you are uncertain of in your piece, such as whether a particular character is believable, whether a change in setting is effective, whether your argument is convincing or whether a piece of subtext came across. In some cases, you may not want to ask these questions until *after* your peer has read your piece – for example, if there is a twist or an element you want to check the effectiveness of, but do not want to artificially direct the reader's attention towards while they are reading.

## ***Proofreading checklist***

- Underline any sentences in which you felt the meaning was unclear the first time you read them.
- Highlight any paragraphs that do not flow smoothly from the paragraph before.
- Circle any spelling errors or typos, or punctuation that is incorrect or awkward.
- Circle any words or phrases that have been overused.
- Circle any phrasing or vocabulary that seems inappropriate for the context, text type or audience (for example, in terms of complexity, formality or style).
- Note any points where the tone is inconsistent.
- Note any content that feels irrelevant or out of place.
- Note any content that feels repetitive.

If you do not have a peer who you can ask to edit your work, you can use all of the same questions and tasks above to help you edit and proofread your work. Try to imagine you are reading someone else's work, and make any notes or corrections that you would make for them.

A trick to help you separate yourself from what you have written while you are editing and proofreading it is to read it aloud. This will slow your reading down and force you to pay more attention so that you don't skip over anything.

## **Writing a reflective commentary**

There is no single correct way to write the accompanying reflective commentary that will be submitted alongside your texts. The commentary is an opportunity for you to deconstruct your text, explaining and justifying your intent and the deliberate choices you made. Note that EAL students will produce a set of annotations of one or both of their original texts outlining their writing choices, rather than an extended commentary.

It is also important to note the 'reflective' element of the task. You have an opportunity to provide insights into your specific writing process: how you got from A to B, the challenges you experienced in crafting your text and what you learned throughout the process.

As such, you should explore how the mentor texts (or other texts) provided you with inspiration and models for writing, focusing on the structural and literary techniques you chose to use in your own work. You can also highlight specific language choices you made, and why you made them.

Although your piece should speak for itself in many ways, the commentary gives you the chance to flesh out subtleties in your writing about protest that deserve closer scrutiny. It also provides you with another chance to show your understanding of the key idea and the features and language of the mentor texts. You can even quote yourself throughout the commentary to illustrate your points.

Although there are several different ways to approach the task, this is still an assessed piece of writing that requires structure and clarity. To assist with this, use the following questions as a guide.

- What form (text type) are you writing in?
- What type/aspect(s) of protest are you attempting to explore? What ideas about the protest are you attempting to convey?
- Who is your audience and what is your purpose? To reflect? To explain? To express? To argue? Or a combination of these? What do you want your audience to take from your piece?
- What mentor texts inspired you? In what way?
- Did you draw on any supplementary texts for ideas or as models for your writing? How?
- What specific word choices or literary techniques are you using? Why? What is the main tone of your piece, and why did you use this tone?
- What have you learned through this writing process?

# SAMPLE RESPONSES

The following sample responses are provided to give you an idea of the types of writing that you can consider for this area of study. The responses are in a range of styles and take inspiration from the four mentor texts. Each piece is followed by a short commentary on the authorial choices.

## Sample response 1: Personal essay

We came in tens of thousands.

We came dressed in red, black and yellow.

We came to reflect, mourn and hope.

We came to demand reparations, justice, reconciliation.

We came to demand change. To Change the Date.

We came from all different walks of life: men, women, non-binary, young, old, with and without disability, Anglo, Asian and Blak. All Australian yet unable to be proudly so. Not until protests like these are no longer needed.

In primary school we had learned that Captain Cook ‘discovered’ Australia. That Captain Arthur Phillip landed on Australian soil on 26 January 1788. That this was ‘terra nullius’, no-man’s-land. All lies, neatly packaged to uphold a self-serving myth and keep us mired in ignorance.

We were told this date was a day for all Australians to celebrate, to ‘rejoice’ that we were all ‘young and free’. Another lie.

Starting from 1938, a perceptible shift began. First Nations peoples began to rebrand the date as a ‘Day of Mourning’. When it was declared a national public holiday in 1994, the idea of celebrating ‘Australia Day’ left a bitter taste for many. Some people

turned their backs on forced nationalism, and January 26 became Invasion Day. Survival Day. A day of protest.

We started that morning on the steps of Parliament House, with its elevated colonnade standing proudly at the top of Bourke Street, imposing its will on the people below. A building that symbolises power and an authority – one that could be used for good but that too often failed its populace. A government that had essentially turned its back on its own people, refusing to acknowledge the sins of the past, highlighting its shameful complicity in the process.

Melbourne had turned on its trademark miserable weather, somewhat appropriate for the occasion. The grey, overcast clouds hung low in the skies, sorrowful winds enclosing us in communal lament.

Banners flapped in the wind, arms raised high to proudly hoist homemade placards, makeshift cardboard protestations that read ‘White Australia has a Black History’, ‘Pay the Rent’ and ‘Amnesia Day’. Whoever said that social justice warriors were devoid of humour had never stood among us. Many of the signs infused their protest with wit and sass, yet were still pointed and political. ‘Privilege is like a Netflix account – better when shared. Decolonise and chill!’ read one. ‘Captain Cooked’ and ‘Not Happy Jan 26’ were also spotted among the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

We came to be heard. Yet we also came to listen.

A podium had been erected to elevate much-needed voices. They would be marginalised and ignored no longer, and there was a lot that needed to be said, that needed to be heard. Piercing feedback gave way to words of wisdom, words of warning.

‘*We got a long way to go, folks,*’ activist Robert Thorpe declared as the audience cheered their commitment. ‘*The colonists have had*

250 years to protect our rights. There's nothing to show for it.' His rallying cry was tinged with sadness.

*'I was there in 1967,' Professor Gary Foley told the assembled masses. 'I remember the elders telling us then that if we got a Yes vote it would change things forever for Aboriginal people. We got the biggest Yes vote in Australian history and nothing changed.'*

Boos reverberated through the swarms of people. *'Shame! Shame!'* we hollered.

Next up was Senator Lidia Thorpe, her fists clenched in the air. *'They have destroyed our water. They have destroyed our land. They have destroyed our families. They have destroyed our sacred sites. They have taken our children and said sorry. Sorry means you don't do it again! So, what are they doing now?'*

Her defiant words echoed over the heads of the crowd, bouncing off nearby buildings in the hopes they would rebound and land directly in the windows of Parliament, where they needed to be heard the most.

The crowd erupted into chants. It seemed spontaneous somehow – within seconds we all joined in as though it were a reflex.

*'No pride in genocide! No pride in genocide!'*

*'Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land!'*

Clapping, stomping, bellowing, we sang, like a well-rehearsed choir.

And then, we were on the move. Following the elders, we turned and headed down Bourke Street. Only then could we see the true perspective of just how many of us were gloriously united in protest, taking over the main street of Melbourne, demanding to be heard, to be seen, to be felt.

We marched in unison, as though choreographed, as if possessed somehow. The cold air slapping our faces, the bitumen

hard beneath our feet. We marched with hope: focused, driven, resolute.

At Swanston Street, the crowd curled left. Stomping past countless police on horseback, we felt a chill from their imposing presence, knowing that they were too often part of the problem and not the solution. Though they had taken an oath to serve and protect, we knew it would not take much for them to turn on us, apprehend and try to stop us. As though we could be stopped.

Passers-by halted, gawking with mouths agape, holding shopping bags, bewildered or irritated or shamed by their non-participation. Some even abandoned their errands and joined us, our numbers swelling proudly as news cameras tried in vain to capture us all in one shot. There were just too many of us. Too many to count. Too many to ignore.

At the intersection of Swanston and Flinders Streets, we came to a temporary standstill. Occupying that iconic space at the steps of the train station, we quietly and gracefully sat down. An act of necessary disturbance, civil disobedience.

*Ding ding ding* went the nearby trams in an act of futility. All public transport vehicles were stuck mid-route. Commuters were unable to cross the street, taxi passengers unable to disembark, police rendered too powerless to intervene.

The end of the protest was marked with deliberate stillness. In a bustling city of five million, you could hear nothing but silence. An ironic moment of calm and peace. The eye of a tempest.

This was a time of individual reflection. To respectfully atone for the past and remember those who could not be present. To ruminate on our purpose before regrouping and continuing the mission. To harness the palpable anger in the air and use it as fuel for the future fight.

We were there to change the date but we all knew this was about more than a date. It was about under-representation in

things that matter and the shameful over-representation in other areas. We marched because one-third of First Nations peoples live in poverty, because their suicide rates are more than double the national average, because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 26 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non-Indigenous peers. We marched to highlight the seven- to eight-year gap in mortality rates when so many of these deaths are preventable.

We marched that day to commemorate too many injustices. We marched that day for Kumanjayi Walker, for Cameron Doomadgee, for Tanya Day, David Dungay, Ms Dhu and too many others who died in custody.

We marched to say sorry.

We marched to Close the Gap.

We marched to demand change.

We marched because it's the right thing to do.

We marched because we don't want to have to march again next year.

## Sample reflective commentary 1

My piece is a personal essay that explores my participation in an Invasion Day protest march in Melbourne. My intention is **to reflect** on the underlying causes for such protests, **to express** the visceral experience of taking part in a march and **to explain** the importance of this particular Australian social justice issue. I am passionate about fighting for social and political change, and believe that changing the current date of Australia Day is the first step in a crucial, ongoing process of reconciliation. I wanted to capture this passion in my essay.

I am writing for an audience of mostly non-Indigenous Australians in an attempt to convey how important these protests are. Those who have never participated in demonstrations

such as the Invasion Day rally can get a firsthand account of the experience. I also wanted to show solidarity with like-minded people who have participated or would participate in such a march, to validate and inspire them to keep fighting the good fight. The essay could potentially be published in an Australian magazine or an appropriate online news website to maximise its reach.

I was particularly inspired by ‘Friday essay: on the Sydney Mardi Gras march of 1978’ by Mark Gillespie. Like him, I wanted to frame my piece around a personal recount within a larger historical context. I appreciated how Gillespie immersed his readers in the event, using purposeful descriptive language and verbatim quotes from chants, banners and speeches from the protest. Unlike Gillespie, I deliberately avoided using singular first-person pronouns as I didn’t want a non-Indigenous person to arrogantly centre themselves in this story. Instead, I employed inclusive language, using the repetition of ‘we came’ and ‘we marched’ to convey how I was just one of thousands present that day and to communicate how important allyship is. The statistics I sourced came directly from the Closing the Gap initiative and Amnesty International and, just like Gillespie’s essay, I infused my firsthand recount with evidence that showed the underlying causes that necessitated this protest.

I elevated the writing with some purposeful literary choices such as imagery, simile and repetition. I described the chanting as ‘like a well-rehearsed choir’ and the weather as ‘grey, overcast clouds [that] hung low in the skies, sorrowful winds enclosing us in communal lament’. I utilised repetition for emphasis throughout my essay, such as ‘There were just too many of us. Too many to count. Too many to ignore.’

Through this process, I learned how to shape my ideas and refine my writing. I started with some brainstorming in class immediately after reading the mentor text. My initial draft was lacking structure as I wrote in quite a rambling way. To refine

this, I returned to Gillespie's essay to study how he weaved the past, present and future into his piece and tried to apply a similar structure. I relistened to many speeches that were given that day to ensure I could quote the speakers accurately. The process of redrafting after receiving peer and teacher feedback was also beneficial to my writing as I was provided with objective advice that helped me identify anything that was unclear, especially to someone who hadn't attended the same event. This gave my story more clarity and improved my writing considerably.

## Sample response 2: Speech

Good morning Principal, Assistant Principal, teachers and other staff present today. Good morning to my fellow students.

Firstly, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional land of the Kulin Nation and I pay my respects to the elders both past and present. This has always been a significant gathering place for the groups of the Kulin Nation, and I acknowledge and respect their continuing connection with the land.

It is that very land that I've come to speak to you about today in the hopes that we can all learn something from our First Nations friends, wise people who have always had a deep understanding and reverence for the ground on which we walk.

We are so blessed to live in such a unique and beautiful part of the world, a land that gives us so much and asks just one thing in return. To protect it.

Although we have an active and engaged Environmental Club at this school planting trees and promoting recycling on campus, we've had a change of tactic lately. You may have heard whispers about our recent actions, but few of you have asked us directly why we did what we did. So, I truly appreciate the opportunity to come here today and dispel a few misconceptions about the recent

climate strike that I and many other members of the Environment Club participated in.

As you're no doubt aware, School Strike 4 Climate is a global movement that has gained real momentum in the past few years. What started in Europe with a few brave students walking away from their classrooms has now grown to a tidal wave of young yet passionate environmentalists who are sick and tired of talk with no action.

To our teachers: yes, we wagged your classes. Yes, we were warned of the consequences. Yes, we disobeyed your rules.

But the time for dutiful compliance is long past. This is a necessary act of essential civil disobedience. And there will be more to come. It brings us no pleasure to defy you or to appear ungrateful but we make no apologies for our words and actions. Because we are angry.

To quote Greta Thunberg, *'You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you. We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not.'*

Like Greta's teachers, you want us to stay in school. But Greta walked out on her teachers in August 2018, never once looking back, and we walked out on you last week. And we will do so again.

You want us to listen passively to your instruction. Complete the tasks that you set, gain the education that you've decided is important. You want us to line up, shut up, follow the rules, do as we're told. All for what? A thriving career? A life of success? A brand new car or fancy beach house will be no good to use when we're living three feet deep in sea water.

I've even heard whispers of punishment, potential suspensions or even expulsions for having the audacity to walk out on school.

What good would that do? You think that's a deterrent? An estimated two million students participated in the march worldwide. Just try suspending all of us. It will only make us more staunch, more determined. Try it. I dare you.

Our protests are not a sign of a disregard for education. They're a sign you've taught us well. For those of you who truly value education, who got into this noble profession to truly help shape the minds of the next generation, I say to you that we are acting exactly as you had hoped.

But – if you are part of the problem and not the solution – I ask you to kindly get out of our way.

If you have voted for the dinosaurs who got us into this mess and intend to again – kindly get out of our way.

If you misunderstand our passion as arrogance or naivety – kindly get out of our way.

If you are apathetic, indifferent, deliberately ignorant – kindly get out of our way.

If you once held on to youthful idealism and hope that things could get better but are now consumed with cynicism, pessimism or condescension – kindly get out of our way.

Like Bob Dylan once sang, *'And don't criticize / What you can't understand / Your sons and your daughters / Are beyond your command / Your old road is rapidly agin' / Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand / For the times they are a-changin''*

If you do want to lend a hand, consider this your invitation to join us next year.

To my brothers and sisters in this fight, I'll see you at the front lines of the next climate strike. We will join arms on this new road, we are beyond their command, our time is now.

March like your lives depend on it, because they do.

## Sample reflective commentary 2

My text is a speech that justifies my participation in the School Strike 4 Climate protest march. My intention is **to express** the passion and determination that provoked this act of defiance and **to argue** for why it was so vital. I also attempted to embody the aims and ideology of this worldwide movement within my speech: a plea to be heard, a demand for more to be done, a rebuttal to those who misunderstood or patronised us.

I am writing for the audience of my school assembly, that is, staff members and other students who are present. The purpose is to appeal to those in authority to listen and try to understand our concerns. Yet the speech hopefully serves as a rallying cry and a call to arms to my peers who also participated in the walkout or could potentially be persuaded to do so next year.

I have been particularly inspired by the many public speeches made by environmental activist Greta Thunberg and her books *Our House is on Fire*, *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* and *The Climate Book*. Thunberg's writing is passionate and deliberately confrontational; she has little patience for climate sceptics, apathetic politicians or disdainful elders. I wanted to mirror this tone and style in my own writing and make the audience a little uncomfortable.

I also drew upon the mentor text 'Freedom or death' by Emmeline Pankhurst. Although it was written over a century ago, I was inspired by Pankhurst's confidence, unwavering focus and audacity. The part of my speech when I ask, 'What good would (punishments) do?' is a homage to Pankhurst's bold defiance when she proudly declares that arrests 'didn't stop' the suffragettes and, in fact, they 'were glad' of those experiences.

Meyne Wyatt's monologue from *City of Gold* was also a model in that I drew on both his passionate declarations about his beliefs and his direct challenges to the audience. I achieved this through

using the second-person ‘you’ to force my audience to confront truths about their own complicity in the issue.

I attempted to follow the standard structure of a speech, starting with a formal introduction normally used when guest speakers address our school assemblies. I then used the body of the speech to shift the tone and systematically challenge, appeal to or pre-emptively rebut the audience, and ended with a call to action. Using this structure, I reminded the audience that the movement is larger than me and my actions, and extended the invitation to them to join the fight. Everyone is impacted by climate change and everyone needs to be part of the solution. I also repeated phrases such as ‘kindly get out of our way’ as a polite reminder to those who obstruct us that we are determined.

My biggest challenge in writing this piece was to harness my anger in a fluent, constructive and still respectful way that would express my passion while not alienating my audience. I needed to walk a fine line between unapologetic and respectful without seeming too unhinged or vengeful. I found it very beneficial to read the speech aloud to myself and others, to hear what it sounded like and anticipate how it might land.

### Sample response 3: Short story

The meat sizzled as Adam placed it on the grill.

Ssssssssss. The classic sound of a sultry Australian summer.

Dinh stood by the barbecue, beer in hand, ready to chat to his friend about how 2074 was assured to be their best year yet. Both men had recently received promotions in their respective government jobs, and today’s get-together was part New Year’s gathering and part congratulatory party before they returned to the slog of their desk jobs the next day.

Their partners Rachel and Laura milled about in the background, setting up some folding chairs on the lawn, blissfully unaware of the ominous red skies above turning darker.

‘Smells good!’ Dinh said, licking his lips.

‘Doesn’t it?’ replied Adam. ‘You know, Rachel tried being a vegetarian for a while there, but the Bureau kept telling us to eat more meat, that it was our patriotic duty. So, she gave it up.’

‘Sensible,’ Dinh nodded.

‘Can you imagine knocking back this steak?’ Adam asked, as he poked the blistering steak with his tongs. ‘Who in their right mind ...?’

Not ten feet from the men, Rachel leaned on the Hills hoist as she coughed for the fiftieth time that morning.

‘Rachel?’ Laura asked, turning her head in the direction of her friend as she carefully removed the cling wrap from a large bowl of potato salad.

‘Huh?’ Rachel heaved, then cleared her throat yet again.

‘Did you say something?’

Rachel had gathered her composure now. ‘Say what?’ Letting go of the clothes line she stumbled back towards the picnic table.

‘Oh, nothing. I thought I heard you speak. Shall we start tossing the salad?’

‘Yes, let’s.’ Rachel snapped back to the task at hand, immediately forgetting her split-second panic only moments earlier.

She checked the weather forecast on her smart watch. Whenever Rachel’s lungs told her that something was very, very wrong, she was reassured by the Bureau that all was normal and to resume her daily routine.

She brought the watch not an inch from her face and squinted to read the screen. The air quality reading was in the ‘healthy’ range. This text came complete with an image of a cute joey winking at the camera.

She sighed, and felt her muscles relax. Rachel felt so relieved to have a government agency who truly cared, who made her feel that things were okay even when a niggling doubt in the back of her mind told her otherwise. She wasn't an expert, it wasn't her place to question.

None of the four were cognisant of the thickening haze that enveloped the backyard. Given there hadn't been blue skies over Sydney in decades, that was hardly surprising. Grey was the new normal, and even when it was tinged with colour like a cheap rosé, as it was today, nobody seemed to notice.

Laura had faint memories of a time in the past when the air wasn't always thick with smoke, but she told herself it must have been a childhood fantasy. The cartoons she watched as a kid were luminous with a varied palette of primary colours, but she knew those hues didn't exist in the real world.

When her eyesight failed her and those around her were simply a shadowy silhouette, her other senses pricked up and got sharper. She could always sense when her husband was nearby, even when she couldn't see him.

Just metres away, Dinh burped as he finished his tinnie, crushing the beer can with his right hand.

'You guys like onions?' Adam asked his guests.

'Absolutely!'

'Bring it on.'

He threw the sliced onions in the direction of the grill and heard them land.

*Beep!* Another alert from the Bureau arrived. All four scrambled for their phones. *Aussie air quality best on record! Carry on and thank your Bureau!*

Just one hundred kilometres from Adam and Rachel's townhouse, a perpetual bushfire continued to burn out of control.

This one had started months ago, joining another raging inferno that had crept over the Queensland border. Millions of acres of land were destroyed as the regular grey skies turned blacker and blacker. Any native animals that were not already extinct were taking their final breaths. Although the fires could be seen from space, people living in nearby towns were none the wiser.

The Bureau had simply diverted all freeway traffic and amped up the notifications that all was normal. Just yesterday, they sent all forty million citizens an image of a koala snuggled into a eucalyptus tree to reassure everyone that the country's mascots were still thriving.

'Reckon the meat's done, mate?' Dinh cracked another beer as the earth beneath them shook.

*BOOM!*

All four revellers swore they felt something, but told themselves it must have been the heavy bass coming from the neighbour's boom box over the fence.

Unbeknownst to the suburban merrymakers, yet another climate protester had blown themselves up on Sydney Harbour Bridge nearby. The lonely dissenter had detonated a homemade bomb they had strapped to their body, selfishly inconveniencing countless motorists for several minutes. On a public holiday, no less.

Back when all four were in primary school, they heard whispers of protesters stopping traffic in the city, only to be swiftly apprehended and never seen again.

'Narcissists,' their teachers had said. 'Sad people desperate for attention.' And that was the end of any discussion.

Now, twenty years later, there was no mention of such demonstrations in the government-run media, despite them occurring on the regular.

When simple protests and civil disobedience failed, the protesters started setting themselves on fire in public spaces, martyring themselves in the faint hope that they would finally draw attention to their cause. They never succeeded.

The smouldering flesh of the latest protester was soon disposed of, although mounds of ashes were picked up by the swirling wind and blended in with the dark clouds that always choked the city.

*Beep!*

An alert from the Bureau announced that one lane of the Harbour Bridge had been closed for scheduled maintenance, but to carry on, all was normal. An image of a swimming platypus accompanied the text.

‘Do you think the meat is done?’ Dinh asked his friend again.

‘Nah, let’s give it a little longer. Just to be sure.’

Laura and Rachel tried clinking their champagne glasses together in a New Year’s toast, though it took them several attempts to find each other’s glass. They giggled at every near miss.

The smell of burned meat enveloped the backyard, distinct from the usual scent in the air of smoking wood and pollution.

‘Mate, do you think it’s done now?’ Dinh asked again, unable to see the barbecue through the haze.

‘I guess so.’

It took Adam several tries to find the meat with his tongs. When he picked up the first piece, it felt rock hard. Dropping the steak on a plate, he swore he heard it thud, like a rock.

Charred to a delicious crisp.

‘Okay! Let’s eat!’

## Sample reflective commentary 3

My piece is a short story set fifty years in the future. I wanted to explore what a dystopian Australia could potentially look like if our current climate crisis is not meaningfully addressed. My narrative explores a world of deliberate ignorance, highlighting the lengths to which powerful people will go to maintain power and control and to stamp out voices of dissent. I also wanted to depict the dangers of apathy in the general population and illustrate how ignoring protest is actually counterintuitive and ultimately self-destructive. Therefore, my intention is **to express** a worst-case scenario of Australia in 2074.

I am writing for an audience of Australians in 2024, particularly those who are not overly political, who choose to ignore the climate emergency. My intention is to make readers deliberately unsettled by the very real prospect that our country could be essentially destroyed by their actions or inactions.

I was particularly inspired by the narrative ‘Harrison Bergeron’ by Kurt Vonnegut. Like that story, my piece is set in the near future when a sinister, almost totalitarian government is deceiving their people by suggesting that what is clearly dystopian is actually utopian. Like Vonnegut, I used an omniscient, third-person narrator who could view the ‘big picture’ that the characters themselves could not see. Both stories integrate everyday dialogue with a sense of impending doom and dread, juxtaposing a happy, normal, suburban setting with the tragedy at hand. Although I wanted my story to be convincing and realistic, I was inspired by Vonnegut’s absurdism and satirical tone and I attempted to use a little of this in my writing. I employed the motifs of smoke and burned meat to symbolise the disaster of climate change. These characters are essentially blind due to the smoke that surrounds them, and are also blind to the truth of the situation. The burned meat on the barbecue serves as a metaphor or potentially a

foreshadowing of how these characters, and civilisation itself, will end up before long.

Through this process, I learned how to shape a complex concept into a simple narrative. This was quite challenging and took several drafts to get right. My first plan was overly ambitious, using various settings and time periods which made the story difficult to follow and weakened the core message. After some peer feedback, I was given the helpful advice to limit the scope and keep the focus on one snapshot in time. As such, I was still able to cover a lot of ground, but it gave my piece a clearer structure with a traditional orientation, rising action, climax and denouement.

## Sample response 4: Monologue

LANGUAGE NOTE: The following piece includes terms that are sometimes used to cause harm to LGBTQIA+ peoples. The student writer has used these explicit terms thoughtfully, with the aim of communicating their own hurt and anger.

*‘Why do queer people always need to shove it down our throats?’*

I hear this constantly. Trust me, if anyone is about to gag, it’s me, hearing this pathetic, lame and clichéd whinge for the millionth time. ‘Shoving it down your throats ...’ as if an army of gay folks is constantly breaking into your homes, hitting you over the head with a disco ball, smothering your face in glitter and screaming Kylie Minogue songs into your ears.

‘Shoving it down your throats’ – what does that even mean? We’re too loud? Too proud? Too much? You want us back in the closet? Silent? Invisible? Cowering in fear?

‘Shoving it down your throats ...’ I swear, the only time I ever hear this is in response to a gay person literally existing.

Just acknowledging a same-sex partner – that’s shoving it down your throat?

Daring to hold my partner's hand in public – that's shoving it down your throat?

Asking for equal opportunity and justice – that's shoving it down your throat?

Shoving it down your throat ... as though you're the threatened one? The oppressed one? You're the victim here? Feeling overwhelmed, powerless, harassed? Under enemy control?

Well, welcome to our world.

*'Why do you need a parade? You don't see me marching for straight pride, do you?'*

Every damned day is straight pride. Every. Damned. Day.

When I can walk out of my house wearing whatever I want and not face those disdainful, sideways glances, then we'll talk about your parade.

When I don't have to modulate my voice in public to avoid hostile glares, then we'll talk about your parade.

When I can enter whatever public bathroom I feel the most comfortable using without being policed or intimidated, then we'll talk about your parade.

When my books, my films, my TV shows, my voice are not censored, banned, burned – then we'll talk about your parade.

When the threat of violence doesn't follow me every step of my journey, then we'll talk about your parade.

The reason we have pride is because of people like you.

The reason we have pride is because society tells us we shouldn't.

The reason we have pride is because every single one of us has been called disgusting, an abomination, unnatural, a deviant, a faggot, a poofter, a dyke, a tranny, a ladyboy, a threat to children. Lesser.

And we STILL have pride, the confidence to hold our heads high, to think that we are worthy, beautiful, of value.

Come to a march. See love, joy and equality in action. We will show you pride.

*'Hey, I voted for marriage equality! What more do you want?'*

Oh thank you! I didn't realise I was meeting the next Mother Teresa! We should have all sent you a thankyou card for the twelve seconds of effort it took to tick that box! Your brave effort immediately eradicated centuries of oppression, prejudice, discrimination and violence in one swift move. We're so damn grateful to you!

Why even bring this up? Are you thinking of revoking our rights? Our equality is negotiable? Conditional? Able to be taken away if we go too far and deign to ask for more?

What more do we want?

What *more* do we want?

For queer people not to be treated like scapegoats, bogeymen, a political football to score points with.

For our trans brothers, sisters and non-binary siblings not to have their rights stripped from them, nor to have medical and healthcare decisions made on their behalf by people who fear them, wish they didn't exist, have probably never met them or bothered to try.

*'Why can't you be more like (insert generic sassy gay character from inane rom-com)? Why do you have to be so political all the time?'*

That's exactly what you want, isn't it? A clown? A court jester? A one-dimensional joker who serves YOUR narrative, affirms YOUR life and YOUR decisions and exists only for YOUR entertainment?

Heaven forbid we take different forms and break away from caricature.

Heaven forbid we abandon our funny one-liners, hair flips and snapping fingers to get political and show another emotion – like anger, pain, resentment, impatience or grief.

You just want a sassy sidekick? Sorry to say, but I can be as normal, boring, humourless and beige as YOU.

*‘What about the kids? Just let them be kids. Think about the kids!’*

That’s exactly who I’m thinking of.

That’s exactly why I’m here.

That’s exactly why I’m speaking and will keep speaking.

The next generation who deserves more than this.

I’m doing this for all the kids. So they’ll never have to answer these stupid questions.

I’m doing this for your kids too. And mine.

And for the kid inside me who almost gave up on it all.

## Sample reflective commentary 4

This monologue is designed **to express** my frustrations at the criticisms, misunderstandings, ignorance and hostility that LGBTQIA+ people still face in Australia. The monologue is partly a dialogue, rebutting and responding to annoying or discriminatory questions that queer people face daily. It also functions to stand up for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people to be treated with equality, dignity and respect.

The monologue is one that could potentially be performed. I imagine it being staged and projected, almost like slam poetry, as it possesses a similar rhythm and cadence. The actor could mimic different voices for the questions posed and make deliberate eye contact with the audience, breaking the fourth wall. Yet the

monologue also works as a piece of writing on the page, almost as an extended poem or a manifesto of sorts.

I am writing for an audience of contemporary Australians, particularly homophobes, transphobes or even those who consider themselves socially progressive. The piece is designed to be deliberately provocative and even unsettling for its audience.

The piece is structured around five questions to touch on five different issues within the overall fight for queer rights and to appeal to fairness and justice. It was important for me to sound as authentic and relatable as possible, so much of the piece is written using casual, conversational and colloquial language. This was elevated with some purposeful repetition to emphasise key points and a hint of sarcasm used to highlight the absurdity of some of the questions queer people constantly face.

Meyne Wyatt's monologue from *City of Gold* was particularly inspiring. Although focusing on an entirely different protest, his style, structure and, above all, passion helped guide me through the process of crafting my own text. Wyatt also begins his monologue with a question, and borrowing this technique helped propel and shape the rest of the piece. I loved his use of colloquial language and how his monologue infuses the personal with the political. Yet it was essential for me to find my own voice instead of trying to mimic somebody else's. I also found it very beneficial to perform the monologue myself, recording it and listening back to hear how it sounded. This helped me build in pauses throughout the piece, as demonstrated by the many line breaks and stand-alone sentences.



## insight

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