

Persuasive writing analyzes the various sides of an issue while arguing a viewpoint. It may serve to clarify your own beliefs as you persuade others to accept a particular perspective.

CREATING A THESIS

The foundation of a persuasive paper is the thesis (often called a claim). To create an effective thesis, you must select an appropriate topic and decide on your position.

SELECT A TOPIC

Persuasive writing addresses topics that are somehow controversial or stimulate discussion because of their complexity. To select a topic, first consider your own opinions. Ask yourself these questions:

- ◀ What issues do I feel strongly about?
- ◀ What topic would I like to learn more about?

Once you have selected a topic, take time to write down everything you know about it. You probably will not use all the ideas you jot down, but this will get you thinking. From here, research the issue thoroughly; become an expert on the topic, and understand *all* sides of the issue. Through research, you will be prepared to decide on a position.

DECIDE ON A POSITION

The position you decide upon becomes your thesis statement or claim – what you want to argue or persuade. This claim will set limits on your topic and allude to the organization of your paper. When deciding on a position, be sure that your thesis is arguable. Avoid arguing about the following:

- ◀ **Indisputable facts.** For example, there is no point in trying to argue that heart disease is deadly. Everyone knows that, so a better argument would revolve around how to stop the rise of heart disease within current American society.
- ◀ **Preferences.** Opinions can be changed, but some people just prefer one thing over another. For example, some people do not like to scuba dive. You cannot convince them to enjoy something they simply do not.
- ◀ **Religion and other deep-rooted beliefs.** Such issues are beyond empirical analysis and are therefore very difficult to argue. Take an angle that does not directly argue these issues. For example, you would not want to try arguing that Christianity is false. This would only incite anger in the people who hold Christianity as a core value.

SUPPORTING YOUR THESIS

After deciding on a claim or thesis, you will need to identify proofs – or premises – to support the thesis. These premises will be stated in your thesis statement in the same order they will be addressed in the paper. Use the persuasive techniques of logos, ethos, and pathos to support your viewpoint and address alternate perspectives.

DEVELOP PREMISES

Premises are the evidence that supports your thesis, and they make up the bulk of your paper. For example, if you are arguing that the United States should not trade with countries that commit human rights violations, your premises might be

- (1) Trading with violating countries philosophically encourages further violations.
- (2) US industries would also end up exploiting people.
- (3) The violating country will be harmed by lack of trade and thereby stop exploiting workers.

The body of your paper will address each of these premises in detail, so you will need sufficient evidence to support each one.

NOTE: Sometimes premises have unstated assumptions. If your reader might disagree with these assumptions, then you have the added task of proving the assumption. For example, by arguing that the US should not trade with countries that commit human rights violations, you are assuming that your reader believes it is wrong to abuse the working class.

USE PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

To be persuasive, your argument must be solid and reasonable. In order to be convincing, you should appropriately apply the persuasive techniques of **logos**, **ethos**, and **pathos**.

- ◀ **Logos:** Appeal to reason by using facts, statistics, research, logical arguments, etc. This is the most convincing technique in academic writing.
- ◀ **Ethos:** Appeal to the credibility or character of the author or of the people quoted. Use credible sources, and prove your own credibility with good academic writing and tone.
- ◀ **Pathos:** Appeal to emotion, values, and beliefs to support your own feelings or passion about the issue. Include personal stories from yourself or others, and use appropriate word choice to emphasize emotion. In academic writing, this technique should be used with care.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Supporting only your own viewpoint is not sufficient for writing a persuasive paper. You must also understand your audience, so you can find ways to support your thesis in a manner convincing to them. Ask yourself the following questions to help you identify and persuade your audience more effectively:

- ◀ What is the audience's knowledge level about your topic?
- ◀ What is their attitude towards the topic?
- ◀ What are the audience's values and beliefs?

These questions will help you identify the character of your audience and establish a tone for your paper that is both professional and reasonable. Assume your audience is intelligent – never sound condescending or know-it-all – but be sure to thoroughly explain concepts. Knowing your audience will also help you determine areas to research in order to effectively address counterarguments.

LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

A large part of understanding your audience is addressing alternative perspectives. This can be done just after the introduction, just before the conclusion, or throughout the paper. Addressing other viewpoints can be intimidating, yet it is essential. Alternative perspectives should be treated fairly – think about what others believe and why they believe so, and focus on the most common arguments. From there, you can either refute or concede. Conceding means that you agree with the argument and acknowledge the issue is complex; follow with a discussion of your next strong point. When refuting arguments, show why your view is more reasonable or stronger. Always build on common ground.

TIPS

- ◀ Use third person rather than first or second person point-of-view.
- ◀ Use examples and vivid descriptions rather than telling your reader what to feel.
- ◀ Avoid absolutes and hasty generalizations such as *always*, *never*, or *all people*. See the Writing Center's *Logical Fallacies* handout for other examples of improper logic.
- ◀ Use evidence that is recent, relevant, and impartial. Have sufficient evidence to justify each point.

- ◀ Follow basic essay format with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- ◀ Make sure to include proper in-text citations and a *Works Cited/Bibliography/References* page.
- ◀ While this handout provides basic guidelines for persuasive writing, always tailor your paper to your audience and the specific assignment.