

CHAPTER 22

PERSUASIVE ESSAYS

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Persuasive writing has the goal of convincing readers that a certain perspective is the desired one. A scholarly writer should persuade without showing any bias. Being neutral, or unbiased, means acknowledging various ways to look at any situation and avoiding extreme points of view. A good persuasive writer does not exclude or ignore the possibility of exceptions to that certain perspective.

Convincing readers about a perspective starts with informing. Then as a persuasive essay progresses, a writer tries to lessen the reader's resistance to the essay's point of view. This can be accomplished by using argumentative and persuasive techniques.

Argumentation and persuasion are sometimes considered the same, but they differ in certain ways. Argumentation involves the use of sound logic, reason, and objective statements. Persuasion, on the other hand, includes the use of dramatic, emotional, and motivational types of support for a particular point of view. Therefore, these two styles of writing work well in concert with each other.

For example, if a writer wants to convince readers about the existence of hunger in the United States, he or she would research facts, statistics, and expert reports. However, if the writer wants to motivate readers to take action to alleviate hunger, a dramatic illustration of a real-life case history about hungry children might be effective. Because readers crave rational arguments about a topic and the emotional connection to caring about a topic, argumentation and persuasion are often used together in the same essay.

Is persuasive writing used in professional and personal lives? Absolutely. In business, employees need to make persuasive proposals for projects, for better processes, or even for a raise. Asking for project approval requires an employee to think of what his or her manager (the audience) needs. The audience needs to know how the proposal benefits them and they have to be convinced of the project's advantages. How does a persuasive business proposal do this? Business proposals normally include facts, figures, and other research about why something should be approved. In addition, a persuasive proposal addresses all possible objections and convinces readers that what is being proposed is beneficial overall. The persuasive mode of writing is useful to all writers professionally and academically.

Important Things to Know About Persuasive Writing:

- A writer can never persuade all readers!
- The steps in the writing process are the same as for other types of writing.
- Most writing styles or modes have persuasive elements.
- Be open to learning about different points of view on your topic.

HOW TO APPROACH WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

The main focus in writing a persuasive essay is the soundness of the argument. The evidence presented needs to be representative of the claims about the topic. For example, if you want to convince readers that a community church's minister embezzled from the church, pre-

senting reliable evidence is critical because people will tend to believe a minister is a good, moral person. This is the skill of using sound logic.

Another approach to persuasive writing happens when the writer uses emotional power to convince readers. Consider commercials that use emotional appeals, such as a cute puppy or a sexy woman or man, to convince customers to buy certain products. In writing, persuasion is accomplished with evocative phrases such as in *this land of the free or jaws of the animal trap crush the bone*. By using dramatic phrases and evidence, the persuasive writer enables readers to envision whatever is being discussed. This is the skill of dramatic, emotional appeals.

A third approach to persuasive writing is inspiring readers to believe in what you say by using credible sources. How can writers truly expect the reading audience to accept what is stated in an essay? Using reliable research sources from experts who have good reputations through their education, experience, or life's accomplishments encourages readers to be more receptive to the claims made in the essay. Quoting a holocaust survivor is more powerful than just quoting a young historian without that actual life experience, for example. Convince the reader that you, as a writer, are worth listening to throughout your essay. This is the skill of using the source's or author's credibility.

SUPPORTING PERSUASIVE CLAIMS

Evidence is not just statistics. Evidence includes expert opinions, anecdotes, illustrative examples, facts, survey results, details, reasons, or an interview with a person who knows a lot about the topic. The evidence should answer the questions: *Who says this is true? Why should I care?*

In order to present convincing evidence, a writer is responsible for finding and analyzing information. That evidence becomes dramatic and emotionally compelling when it paints a vivid picture of an aspect of the topic being discussed, like the suffering of an abused child.

The most important item about presenting evidence in a persuasive essay is that it must be documented to give credit to the author or organization that stated it. (For proper citation guidelines, refer to Chapter 12, *Basic Citation Guidelines*, pp. 121–142, as well as use an official citation guide.)

ROGERIAN STRATEGY

The Rogerian strategy creates goodwill to answer opposing points of view early in a persuasive discussion. This strategy is named after a prominent psychologist, Carl Rogers, who believed that part of the job of a writer was to reduce conflict instead of trying to be the winner of the debate.

Making readers angry by threatening their beliefs is counterproductive to the success of your persuasive essay. When people feel threatened, they naturally shut down and don't want to listen, so try to avoid alienating readers by offering only one side of a story. Instead, find some common ground between your perspective and the perspectives of others. When you acknowledge that other points of view exist, you are respecting the reader, thus creating common ground. This decreases the chance for conflict and encourages the reader to listen and be open to the supporting evidence presented in your essay.

Example: The topic is sex education in schools. Using the Rogerian strategy, a writer acknowledges the opposing point of view right away about parents handling sex education at home in private. For instance: *Although sex education should be the prerogative of parents of teens, many parents fear this conversation and never talk about sex.* At this point, statistics could be discussed showing how many teens never learn about sex in the home environment. The threat felt by readers who believe in private sex education has been lessened. Respect has been demonstrated for the opposition.

When writers share what they have in common with those who hold a different opinion, more often than not, the reader gains respect for the writer. Consequently, the reader becomes more open to listen-

ing to the writer's perspective, and the reading audience becomes more receptive to the writer's perspective. The following are suggested strategies for planning and writing a persuasive essay.

Plan for Writing a Persuasive Essay

1. Introduction

- Describe problem
- Get attention
- Surprise readers
- Suggest benefits
- Ask questions

2. Body paragraphs

- Keep building interest
- Acknowledge opposition
- Lessen resistance to your point of view
- Prove the value of your perspective
- Present evidence
- Quote experts

3. Closing and conclusion

- Tell readers what actions to take
- Show respect
- Reveal new synthesized knowledge
- Look at the future of the issue