

Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

An author writes a persuasive/argumentative piece to convince, persuade or change the opinion of the reader about a particular issue. It is never easy to convince someone to change their mind. The challenge in this genre is to be aware of your audience, acknowledging their viewpoint, at the same time as you respectfully refute it.

An effective persuasive writer selects strong facts and solid information to support their position. The written argument is built carefully, presenting the case in a reasonable, logical manner. In other words, give the reader an opportunity to stand in your shoes and see the situation through your eyes without alienating them.

Empowering Writers has identified the skills necessary to build a solid argument and write a powerful persuasive piece. The skills presented in this genre are not only effective in writing for school projects, but transfer into the working world as well. As your student writer matures he/she will be asked to write persuasively for: the SAT writing portion, high school exit exams, debate or oral projects, and across the curriculum spectrum. In the working world you see persuasive writing in the form of proposal documents, inter-office email, and college admissions or job application essays.

The following pages from *The Persuasive Writing Guide* have been chosen for both background information on Empowering Writers and specific techniques taught in persuasive writing.

(continued ...)

Name _____

Pro/Con - Know Both Sides of the Issue!

In order to successfully persuade another person to see something from your point of view, it is critical to understand both sides of the issue. Why would someone hold the opposite point of view? What's "in it" for him? What are the advantages of the opposing view? What does a person have to gain or lose by embracing the opposing view? These are all questions that need to be acknowledged and addressed in order to successfully persuade someone to change his opinion.

Look at the following question. Before writing a persuasive piece, the author has brainstormed three positive and three negative aspects of this issue:

The Issue:	
Should soda be available in the school cafeteria?	
PRO	CON
1.) Students should be able to make their own choices about what to eat and drink.	1.) Schools have a responsibility to provide healthy choices.
2.) Since students have to pay for a beverage they should be able to get what they want.	2.) Parents usually provide money for lunch, and therefore should be assured that their money is well spent on healthy beverages.
3.) The large soda companies offer cash bonuses to schools for every can of soda sold.	3.) Soda companies stand to make huge profits while compromising good nutrition in our schools.

Name _____

Affirm Your Audience

Think of a time when someone tried to convince you to change your mind about something. Were they successful? Why or why not?

Most people hold fast to their opinions and resist any attempts to sway their particular point of view. (Have you ever witnessed a conversation about politics? Many times the conversation becomes an argument that nobody wins.) This is because people often imply that to disagree with them is just plain stupid. Once someone suggests that you are stupid, or less than enlightened, or just can't listen to reason, the natural tendency is to dig your heels in, stop listening, and become more firmly committed to your own opinion.

So, in order to sway someone's point of view, it is critical to respectfully acknowledge their opinion, and to use their opinion as a jumping off point for expressing your alternate view.

How can you do this? The following sentence starters can help you to acknowledge an opposing viewpoint and to link it to your own point of view. In this way, your audience is not disregarded or dismissed.

Opposing Point of View: _____ **My Point of View:** _____.

Many people feel that _____, but actually _____.

Despite the fact that _____, there _____.

Although some people believe _____, you'll see why _____.

I can understand the POV that _____, but _____.

It's easy to see why _____, however _____.

I used to think that _____, yet _____.

Regardless of the fact that _____, in my experience _____.

Some people think that _____, nevertheless _____.

You might believe that _____, still, _____.

On the next page there are a number of opposing viewpoints. Watch how some of these sentence starters can be used to acknowledge the opposing view and introduce your alternate view.

Name _____

The Bandwagon Technique

One way to convince your audience to accept your position is to encourage them to “get on the bandwagon.” This technique assigns positive characteristics to people who accept or agree with a particular view, opinion, or position. The assumption is that your audience will want to be a part of this “bandwagon” group. Here are some examples:

Well-informed students agree that we must offer more foreign language courses.

Responsible citizens consistently support the mayor’s plan for a reasonable tax increase.

Stylish, hip kids all insist on shopping at Robin’s rather than at the mall.

Successful students all use this software.

Experienced travelers agree that this cruiseline offers the best value.

Bright, capable young people are attracted to this program.

Caring, loving parents are willing to take a stand on this issue.

Who doesn’t want to be **well informed, responsible, stylish and hip, successful, experienced, bright, capable, caring, and loving**? Well, if people who agree with your position can be described in these ways, what can we assume about those who disagree? This is a subtle way of implying that to disagree might make you poorly informed, irresponsible, unstylish and square, unsuccessful, inexperienced, incapable, and uncaring. This technique is designed to encourage those who oppose your view to reconsider.

Look at the next page of positive adjectives that might be used to encourage your audience to “jump on the bandwagon.”

Name _____

“Bandwagon Adjectives”

RESPONSIBLE

reputable
professional
respected
dependable
reliable

STYLISH

classy
chic
tastefully dressed
in-vogue
trendy

SUCCESSFUL

top
prominent
winning
effective
distinguished
outstanding

EXPERIENCED

accomplished
seasoned
expert
veteran

BRIGHT

clever
talented
inventive
perceptive
well informed

CARING

devoted
kind
charitable
generous
compassionate

HARDWORKING

industrious
determined
serious
conscientious
well prepared

WELL INFORMED

in-the-know
with-it
experienced
well versed
fair-minded

CAPABLE

effective
competent
qualified
professional
skillful

Name _____

Issue: Should you adopt a kitten?

List Pros (**P**) and Cons (**C**):

P cute	P C litter box	P affectionate
C aloof	C claw furniture	P playful
P good company	C vet bills	P save a stray's life
C cost of food/supplies	C constant responsibility	
P C lots of toys	C shedding	P easier care than a dog

Assuming you're "**PRO-KITTEN**,"

LINK cons with "yes, but...":

Litter box - yes, but you don't have to walk a cat like you do a dog

Aloof - yes, but they don't need your attention every minute

Claw furniture - yes, but not if you buy a scratching post

Vet bills - yes, but that's a small price to pay to keep your feline friend healthy and happy

\$\$\$Food/supplies - yes, but once you've fallen in love with your cute furry friend you won't bat an eyelash

Toys underfoot - yes, but you can get a cute basket for cat toys - and you'll enjoy watching your cat's playful antics

Shedding - yes, but if you have a cozy blanket for your cat she'll stay off your furniture

Constant responsibility - yes, but with all the affection you receive from your kitten, you'll enjoy it



SECTION 4: Supporting Details

Introduction to Supporting Details

Introduction - Supporting Details

It is never enough for an author to simply state her/his position on an issue and tell the audience, in general terms, that their position is best. Instead, the author must support each argument with a variety of powerful details. Generating these details can be challenging for students.

In the writing process, authors ask themselves many questions in order to fully explore their topic. Knowing the kinds of fertile questions to ask is the key to learning how to generate powerful details. The quality of the questions will determine the quality of the answers - in other words, powerful, relevant details will emerge once students know the kinds of questions to ask.

This section will explore a wide range of details that are convincing in a persuasive essay. There is a strong carry-over to the questioning techniques that are effective in expository writing.

DETAIL GENERATING QUESTIONS - EXPOSITORY WRITING

- What does that “look” like?
- Why is that important?
- Can you give a specific example of that?
- Is each detail in a separate sentence?

In persuasive writing we expand on these questions to include the following:

DETAIL GENERATING QUESTIONS - PERSUASIVE WRITING

- What does that “look” like?
- Why is that important to your argument?
(*What does your audience have to gain by agreeing or lose by disagreeing?*)
- Can you give a specific example?
- Did you acknowledge the opposing view and counter it with a “yes, but...”?
- Did you invite your audience to “join the bandwagon”?
- Did you ask a rhetorical question?



Name _____

Introductions

First impressions count for a lot - most people form an opinion quickly, and therefore, the first moments of an exchange, whether in conversation or in writing, can set a tone, and either establish a rapport with, or alienate the other.

In persuasive writing, where the author's purpose is to persuade or convince the audience, the introduction is critical. The author must be sure that the introduction does not polarize the reader by being insensitive to the alternate point of view. The best way to keep a reader open-minded and available to your point of view is to maintain a balanced, fair-minded tone, and to present the issue clearly in the introduction.

It is not always necessary, or even advisable, to adamantly state your position immediately, as this may encourage those with another point of view to hold more firmly to it, to read on with a critical eye, or worse, to stop reading altogether. If the author chooses to state his or her position up front it must be done in an even-handed way that does not insult or put off the reader. A strong lead that paints a vivid picture or captures the reader's attention can be a powerful incentive for the reader to find out what else you have to say.

These are the two elements that contribute to an effective introduction - a strong lead, and a clear statement of the issue at hand. There are a number of creative ways to generate leads and issue statements that will get your persuasive essay off to a strong start and keep your readers interested and invested enough to read on.

There are a number of types of leads that can be used. Beginning with:

- *a statement of concern*
- *embracing a high ideal*
- *painting a powerful picture*
- *using a bandwagon statement*
- *using a rhetorical question*
- *using a quote or testimonial*
- *using a statistic*
- *or an anecdote*

are all interesting ways to lead into your persuasive piece. You can also combine these techniques for more punch. Keep in mind that quotes, testimonials, and statistics must be factual. You cannot "make them up." These can be based on your own personal experience, or on your research. It is not ethical to mislead the reader with a persuasive statement of this kind that is not valid.

All of these techniques are defined on the following pages with plenty of opportunities to identify and practice each.



Name _____

State the Issue in Your Introduction!

After you've grabbed the reader's attention with a strong lead, it is important to state your issue clearly in the introduction of your essay. This is called the issue statement. It would be easy to simply write: *The issue is* _____. This certainly states the issue clearly, but it is also rather boring. Successful authors state the issue in a variety of interesting ways. Below you will find a number of "sentence starters" that can be used to express the issue clearly, in a more interesting way, and that will not alienate a reader holding an alternate point of view.

- The question then is _____? Should we _____ or _____?
- What is the dilemma? _____? Do we _____ or _____?
- The issue to grapple with is _____. Here's the controversy: _____.
- The problem is _____. We need to decide whether to ___ or ___.
- Must we _____ or _____? Would we rather _____ or _____?
- Of course, everyone is concerned about __. We all need to consider _____.
- To ___ or to ___, that is the question. _ The difficulty involves whether to ___ or ___.
- It seems we have two options, ___ or __. Here's the challenge: Do we prefer ___ or ___?
- We need to determine if _____. Would you _____ or _____?
- It will be important to decide _____. Think about whether you'd like to _____.
- The debate is about _____. What's your position? Do we ___ or ___?
- Are you for or against _____? How do you feel about _____?
- Ponder this: _____ or _____? Let's decide. Do we ___ or do we _____?
- The question everyone's asking is, _____? We need to resolve this issue: _____.

Look at the following issue. See if you can use some of these sentence starters to state this issue in a clear and interesting way: *Should the school have a stricter dress code?* Also, think about the alternative to a stricter dress code. You'll need to include this in your revision.

Name _____

Conclusion Paragraphs

The conclusion paragraph in a persuasive essay serves an important purpose. It is the author's last chance to convince the reader of the value of the arguments presented and an opportunity for the author to **powerfully and creatively restate the issue and each main argument**. This is the time for a **call to action**, when the author appeals to the reader to do something - to take a stand, or to change an opinion they'd previously held. The author uses powerful language and **definitive words and phrases** to win over the audience.

It is important to avoid a redundant, boring restatement of the main arguments at the end. Here are two conclusions to compare. One powerfully and creatively restates each main argument and presents a clear call to action. The other conclusion is weak and ineffective. Can you tell the difference?

- 1.) So, now you know why you should vote for me for class president. I will work for more after-school activities. Another reason is I will convince the school to have more dances with live music. The last reason you should vote for me is that I am a good listener and will hear what you have to say. So, vote for me, and things will improve for everyone at school.
- 2.) The time has come to decide. Who do you want to represent you? If you want more exciting, stimulating after-school activities like a ski club, and coffee house, and school dances with the hottest local bands - these are just two reasons to give me your vote. But most importantly, vote for someone who will be your voice on the student council and with the school administration. The choice is clear - get out there and cast your vote for me, Carrie Evers - the only choice for you.

Notice how the second example uses vivid language to powerfully restate each argument in specific terms. The author also stresses the most important, most convincing argument: that to vote for Carrie Evers means the reader will have a voice. The ending is powerful - the use of strong definitive language (*the choice is clear*) and a strong call to action (*get out there and cast your vote for me...*).

Techniques to Improve Persuasive Conclusions

A NOW OR NEVER STATEMENT -

Create a sense of urgency and immediacy in order to rouse your reader to action.

USE VIVID LANGUAGE -

Restate each argument in a compelling way.

HIGHLIGHT THE MOST IMPORTANT ARGUMENT -

Stress the argument you felt was the most convincing.

USE A DEFINITIVE WORD OR PHRASE -

Take on a tone of authority to help convince the reader.

A CALL TO ACTION -

Clearly state what it is you want the reader to do.

What you can do to support your student writer:

Reading your child's work and offering suggestions is about the last thing that your student is looking for. Most children will resist even the most subtle of changes. The following questions will help to guide your suggestions and hopefully empower your maturing author to make editing changes where necessary. Keep in mind the purpose of persuasive writing is to convince or persuade someone to change their mind.

- Look at the overall organization of the piece. Does it have an introduction, at least 3 main arguments, and a conclusion?
- Does the author state the issue, in other words, set the purpose for the piece in the introduction?
- Are the arguments broad enough to support a number of details? Or are they vague and general? For example: *A new turf field will be better for playing* is overly vague and does not offer enough in the way of supporting evidence. A more specific argument might be: *A new turf field will save money in the long run because it requires less maintenance than a grass field.*
- Did the author describe the detail and tell why it is critical to the argument? For instance: the issue of school starting later lends itself to this argument; *high school students need more sleep.* In order to support this argument one detail might be; *Teachers will gain the attention of their first period classes if proper sleep needs are met.* A more general detail might be: *Students want to sleep more because it is better for us.* Look for overly general details and discuss possible ways to be more specific.
- Did the writer encourage the reader to join the bandwagon? For example: ***Stylish, independent students*** agree that a dress code would greatly inhibit creativity and freedom of expression.
- Has the author acknowledged the alternate viewpoint and gently refuted it? For example: *Although some people prefer cats over dogs because they are easier to care for, there are plenty of small dog breeds that require minimum care.* This skill gives an author the ability to connect to the audience and then offer their own viewpoint.
- Has the author written a conclusion that highlights the most critical argument and includes a well stated call to action? A call to action is what sets a persuasive piece apart from an expository piece. For example: *Cast your vote for a new turf field with lights.* This requires some action on the part of the reader.

When looking to aid your child it is important to understand the assignment, and the purpose for persuasive writing. Look for ways they can "spin" the argument in their favor, or for positive and negative word choices. Offer suggestions and ask effective questions keeping in mind that the student is the author and must present a well thought out case for his or her opinion in the piece of writing.