

# Persuasive Writing

*Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.*

---

Persuasive writing makes a claim while analyzing additional sides of an issue. Usually, the writer attempts to persuade others to accept a particular perspective.

## Select a Topic

Persuasive writing addresses topics that are controversial or complex. To select a topic, first consider your own opinions. Ask yourself:

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

Once you have selected a topic, write down everything you know about it to determine some keywords for your evidence search. Then, research the issue thoroughly to acquaint yourself with the “conversation” surrounding the topic. Most topics will have more than simply two sides.

## Decide on a Position

The position you choose will become part of your **thesis statement**. This thesis will set limits on your topic and may point to the organization of your paper. When deciding on a position, be sure that your thesis is arguable. The following generally do not make good topics for persuasive papers:

- **Indisputable facts.** For example, the fact that heart disease is deadly is well-established, so there is no need to persuade an audience of this fact. A better argument would revolve around how to stop the rise of heart disease as there are many ideas surrounding this topic.
- **Preferences.** For example, some people do not like to scuba dive. You cannot convince them to enjoy something they simply do not enjoy.
- **Religion.** Religious faith is beyond empirical analysis and very difficult to argue.

## Supporting Your Thesis

After deciding on a claim or thesis, you will need to identify points—or premises—to support the thesis. A strong persuasive argument will also address alternate perspectives fairly before refuting them.

## 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 encourages further violations.
2. U.S. industries might also end up exploiting people.
3. If trade were halted, the violating country will be harmed by lack of trade and thereby might 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 point.

# Persuasive Writing

*Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.*

---

## 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 convincing manner. 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 their values and beliefs?

Answering these questions will establish a tone for your paper that is both professional and reasonable. Assume your audience is intelligent, but still thoroughly explain concepts. Knowing your audience will also help you determine areas of concern to research in order to effectively address counterarguments.

## Look at Alternative Perspectives

A large part of understanding your audience is addressing alternative perspectives. Addressing other viewpoints can be intimidating, but 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 to opposing arguments.

- When refuting arguments, show why your view is stronger or more reasonable. Always build on common ground.
- Conceding means that you agree with the argument and acknowledge the issue is complex; you then follow with a discussion of your next strong point.

## General 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.
- Use evidence that is recent, relevant, and impartial to justify each point.
- Cite your sources appropriately.