Persuasive Writing

The purpose of persuasive writing is to convince an audience to **think, feel, or act in a specific way**. Examples of persuasive writing include advertisements, opinion editorials, political speeches, argumentative essays, cover letters, grant or research proposals, and social media posts. This handout outlines suggestions for persuasive writing, but always write with your audience and assignment in mind.

Select Your Subject

Select a subject you are **interested in** to keep you engaged in the writing process. Make sure there is ample **research available** and **multiple perspectives** to examine and inform your work.

Consider Your Purpose

Purpose provides **direction and intention** for your writing. Determine if you are arguing *for* or *against* something and what specific *action* you want the audience to take as a result of your argument. Do you intend to inform, convince, inspire, motivate, or call to action?

Understand Your Audience

Identifying your audience's **shared values, beliefs, and concerns** is crucial for persuasion. Consider the size of your audience. Are you persuading an individual or a group? Understand your audience in relation to your position. Are members of your audience neutral, supportive, or opposed? Tailor your approach accordingly.

Frame Your Position

Your position in relation to that of your audience will inform how you communicate with and persuade them. Imagine your position as a point on a circle with your audience's viewpoint also located somewhere on that same circle (as shown in Figure 1).
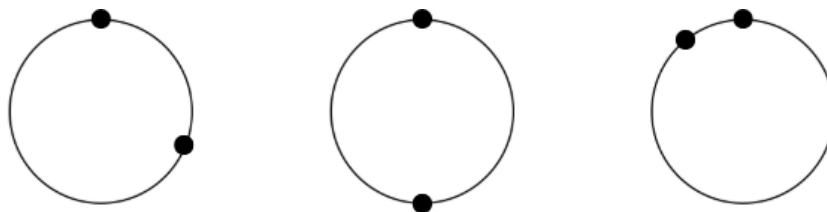

Figure 1. Points on circles to represent varying positionalities in relation to each other.

No matter your positionality, **establish and frame your position, building upon shared values**, **beliefs, and concerns**. For example, you and your audience may share a concern but have different ideas about addressing that concern. Alternatively, your stance may appear opposite from that of your audience, but you may have shared experiences or values to draw upon. Continually assess your position in relation to your audience, and adapt your approach to persuasive communication accordingly.

Explore Different Perspectives

Researching and understanding other perspectives is helpful to **establish credibility** with your audience and **strengthen your persuasive impact**. Broadening the range of your research will help you become more informed, assist in identifying and navigating biases (preconceived beliefs and assumptions), and may lead you to a different or more nuanced perspective. This process will continually help you to **narrow the scope of your subject** and **determine your stance**.

Make Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetorical appeals are methods of persuasion that help writers appeal to and build relationships with their audience. Key rhetorical appeals are **ethos, pathos, and logos**.

- **Ethos** uses authority and establishes credibility to build trust between you and your audience. Rhetorical tools that build ethos include referencing credible sources, establishing both your own and your source's credentials, and deferring to experts on the topics you are writing about.

- **Pathos** uses emotion and values to connect you to your audience. Rhetorical tools that build pathos are humor, vivid imagery, anecdotal stories (personal or otherwise), and shared values.

- **Logos** appeals to your audience's sense of reason. Rhetorical tools that build logos include logically structuring arguments, incorporating data and statistics, relying on common sense, and avoiding logical fallacies or faulty reasoning.

In persuasive writing, you will generally use a combination of rhetorical appeals to effectively persuade your audience to act or agree with you. Select rhetorical tools specific to your purpose, audience, genre, and discipline or field.

Structure Your Argument

Outline your argument based on your claim, audience's needs, and genre of writing. Most successful persuasive writing will include the following elements:

- **Claims** are arguable assertions you make about your issue. They are typically presented at the end of the introduction as a thesis statement.

- **Context** provides background information to help your audience understand your claim. This information is often provided in the introduction.

- **Reasons, rationale, and qualifications** are the justifications you make for your claims by answering questions or challenges your audience may have about your claims. These often function as subtopics within their own paragraphs or sections.

- **Evidence** provides information and facts supporting your reasons or rationale. Sources and evidence are typically integrated throughout your writing.

- **Analysis** draws connections between your argument and evidence, helping your audience understand your stance. Analysis is generally integrated throughout your writing.

- **Opposing viewpoints** address and refute potential objections or competing claims, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the topic. Opposing viewpoints or counterarguments may function as their own section or be incorporated throughout the writing.

- **Calls to action** or specify what you want your audience to do after reading, such as changing a belief or taking action. They are usually found in the conclusion and may be referenced earlier in the paper.