

Writing a Persuasive Paragraph or Essay

Choose a debatable topic

A debatable topic has two valid arguments. Your topic should be one about which you know something. The more evidence you can provide, the more likely you are to sway your audience. You must plan on doing research and your essay must be documented properly.

Formulate an argumentative thesis

Some topics have been discussed so often they are tired, uninteresting and not worthy of discussion. Choose a current topic. Because the purpose of a persuasive essay is to convince readers to accept your position, your thesis must take a stand. One way to make sure that your thesis actually does take a stand is to formulate an antithesis, a statement that takes an arguable position opposite from yours.

Define your terms

You must make clear the terms you use in your argument. Be careful to use precise language in your thesis, avoiding vague words such as wrong, bad, right and immoral, which convey different meaning to different people.

Accommodate your audience

Who are your readers? Are they unbiased observers or people deeply concerned about the issue you are discussing? Are they skeptical, hostile, emotional or unconcerned? How will you convince each type?

Consider opposing arguments

You must know how to refute opposing arguments. Do this by showing that opposing views are untrue, unfair, illogical, unimportant or irrelevant. Discuss the limitations of the opposing view. When you acknowledge an opposing view, do not distort it or present it as ridiculously weak. This tactic, called creating a straw man, could seriously undermine your credibility.

Gather evidence

Build your argument on assertions, claims you make about a debatable topic backed by evidence which is supporting information in the form of examples, statistics or expert opinion. Document your evidence carefully.

Establish your credibility

Establish your credibility by finding common ground, demonstrating knowledge, and maintaining a reasonable tone. Demonstrate knowledge about your subject by personal experiences and research. Make certain that you document source material very carefully. For your instructor, an undocumented quotation or even an incorrect date can call an entire paper into question. Use reasonable language, not emotionally charged language that will turn away the reader.

Present your points fairly

Avoid distorting evidence and quoting out of context. In other words, be honest.

Don't Apologize

Never suggest that you don't know what you're talking about or that you're not enough of an expert in this subject that your opinion would matter. Avoid phrases like, "In my humble opinion....I'm not sure, but....." Make a BOLD statement and proceed with confidence!

Don't Refer to Yourself

Do not announce what you are about to do in the essay. "In this paper, I will..... The purpose of this essay is to....." JUST DO IT! Do not say, "I believe students need less homework....I think there are other important things." State your opinions as FACTS. "Students need less homework because....."

Persuasive Essay Outline

Thesis:

I. The introduction

The introduction to your persuasive essay orients your audience to your subject. Tell the reader why your subject is a valid concern, why it is interesting, or explain how it has been misunderstood. This is a short paragraph.

II. Background Statements

Present a brief overview of the subject. You may include a narrative of past events, a summary of others' opinions on your subject, or a summary of basic facts. Keep your background statement short; long, drawn-out discussions at this point will distract your readers from the focus of your argument.

Your thesis statement should be toward the end of this paragraph. The thesis must contain your subject and your stance. Follow the thesis with a statement of your major support ideas.

III. Support 1-This should be your weakest support.

- A.
- B.
- etc.

IV. Support 2

- A.
- B.

V. Support 3-This should be your strongest support

- A.
- B.

VI. Refutation of opposing arguments

Anticipate the arguments, admit their strengths and then refute the points.

VII. Summarize key points, restate your thesis, reinforce the weaknesses of opposing arguments, or underscore the logic of your position.

The conclusion restates in general terms the major arguments you have presented to support your thesis. End with a strong last line, an apt quotation or a statement that captures the sentiments and intensity of your argument.

A Persuasive Essay – Example

Writing the persuasive essay is not an English-class-only task. You will find that complaint letters, job application letters, business presentations, grant applications, speeches, and many others can be structured as persuasive essays. And why not? After all, their task is to persuade the reader. Most persuasive essays are approximately 5 paragraphs in length, with the 3 middle paragraphs as the Body. The example here has only 1 Body paragraph, and is in the form of a letter of complaint to Time magazine.

Paragraph 1: The Introduction	
I've been a loyal Time reader for as long as I can remember.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hook
I appreciate Time's ability to provide a clear summary of the major news stories of the week, supported by colorful pictures and the occasional chart. For someone with little time for newspapers, Time allows me to skim through a week's worth of news quickly. Your new layout, however, is hard to read and makes skimming impossible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transition
Time should return to its original design.	Thesis statement
Paragraph 2: The Body	
Readability studies published in the December, 2000 issue of Computer Magazine show that most people read serif fonts faster and more comfortably than they do sans-serif fonts. Such studies also show that ragged-right or justified layouts are easy to read, while ragged left is not. Why, then, would the editors of Time allow the magazine to be published using a sans-serif font in a ragged-left format? A one-page article, which I could skim in under five minutes, now takes me at least ten to decipher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The paragraph sticks to a single topic: the lack of readability of the new magazine. ▪ The paragraph uses an authoritative study as evidence to support the primary argument.
Paragraph 3: The Conclusion	
If you care at all about your loyal readers, you will see the importance of returning Time to its original design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Restates the thesis statement without using the exact same words.
Time is meant to be a time saver. It is meant to provide a quickly-read summary of the week's news for those of us too busy to read the newspaper or watch CNN. Creating a layout that makes quick reading difficult is bound to cost you readers. This is a cost I am certain the editors of Time are unwilling to bear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Summary of your central idea in the body paragraph(s).
Returning to your old format will help you to keep me as a reader for many years to come.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Graceful exit, here connecting back to the hook in the first paragraph

PERSUASIVE ESSAY RUBRIC

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Quality</i>			
	1	2	3	4
Make a claim	I do not make a claim	I make a claim but it is buried confused, or unclear	I make a claim but don't explain why it is controversial	I make a claim and explain why it is controversial.
Give reasons in support of the claim.	I do not give convincing reasons in support of the claim.	I give 1 or 2 reasons which don't support the claim well, and/or irrelevant or confusing reasons	I give reasons in support of the claim, but overlook important reasons.	I give clear and accurate reasons in support of the claim.
Consider reasons against the claim.	I do not give reasons against the claim.	I acknowledge that there are reasons against the claim, but don't explain them.	I discuss reasons against claim, but leave out important reasons and/or don't explain why the claim still stands	I thoroughly discuss reasons against the claim and explain why the claim is valid anyway.
Organization	My writing is aimless and disorganized.	My writing is usually organized but sometimes gets off topic. Has several errors in paragraph format.	My writing has a clear beginning, middle and end. I generally use appropriate paragraph format.	My writing is well organized, has a compelling opening, strong informative body and satisfying conclusion. Has appropriate paragraph format.
Word choice	I use the same words over and over and over.... Some words may be confusing.	My words are dull, uninspired or they sound like I am trying too hard to impress	I use mostly routine words.	The words I use are striking but natural, varied and vivid.
Sentence Fluency	Many run-ons, fragments and awkward phrasings make my essay hard to read	My sentences are often flat or awkward. Some run-ons and fragments	I wrote well constructed but routine sentences.	My sentences are clear, complete and of different lengths.
Conventions	Many errors in grammar, capitalization, spelling and punctuation make my paper hard to read.	Frequent errors are distracting to the reader but do not interfere with the meaning of my paper	My spelling is correct on common words. Some errors in grammar and punctuation. I need to revise it again.	I use first-person form, and I use correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and spelling.