

# 13

## Writing an analysis

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Analysing and comparing the use of argument and persuasive language in media texts on a topical issue is part of your School-assessed Coursework and is also part of the final exam.

The SAC task involves writing a detailed discussion and explanation of how argument and persuasive language are used to position an audience, in two or three media texts. These texts will probably present contrasting points of view and perspectives on an issue, and will present their arguments and use language (including visual language) in different ways. Your analysis will carefully consider how argument and language work together in each piece to persuade readers to agree with the point of view expressed.

Comparing and contrasting the use of argument and language in different texts will give you a clearer understanding of how these are influenced by each writer's purpose and audience. These skills, in turn, will enable you to develop and deliver your own persuasive oral presentation in Unit 4.

## Task requirements

Your SAC task for Unit 3, Outcome 2 requires you to write a detailed analysis and comparison of two or three texts on a topical issue. The texts must have appeared in the media since 1 September of the previous year, and will include visual as well as written material.

For **English** students, a total of 40 marks is available for this task, and the response should be 800–1000 words in length.

For **EAL** students, a total of 40 marks is available for this task, comprising 10 marks for demonstrating an understanding of two or three texts that present a point of view on an issue (through short-answer responses and/or note-form summaries), and 30 marks for an analysis and comparison of argument and persuasive language in the same two or three texts. EAL responses should be approximately 700–800 words in length.

You will also be required to write an analysis of argument and language in the final exam.

See the Assessment Sheet on page 225 for sample criteria for this SAC task.

## Essential elements checklist

A high-level analysis will do the following:

- Demonstrate your understanding of the intent and logical development of an argument.
- Show that you recognise the features and conventions of persuasive text types.
- Demonstrate your understanding of the ways in which writers construct arguments to position audiences, making strategic decisions about structure, using reason and logic, and carefully selecting written, spoken and visual language to achieve particular effects.
- Demonstrate awareness of the ways in which the audience, purpose and context of a text affect its construction.
- Analyse the way in which argument and language work together to position the reader to agree with a point of view.
- Consider the similarities and differences between persuasive texts, including visual texts, in terms of their effect on their intended audiences.
- Be supported with well-selected textual evidence and quotations.
- Be written fluently, clearly and coherently, using relevant metalanguage where appropriate.

## Keys to success

- Plan your analysis. Begin by carefully selecting the examples of argument and language techniques you intend to analyse.
- Don't try to analyse every example of persuasive language or every point of argument. It is better to analyse three or four examples in depth than to discuss many examples superficially.
- Be familiar with metalanguage such as the names of common argument and persuasive language techniques. Remember that not every example of persuasive language can easily be labelled; be prepared to analyse any examples of argument and language that position an audience, even if you can't identify them by name.
- Even if you choose to analyse different media texts in separate paragraphs, ensure you use vocabulary appropriate to the task of comparing texts, such as 'in contrast' or 'similarly'.
- Do not give your own point of view on the issue discussed in the texts.
- Avoid making negative judgements. Your task is to *analyse*, not to *criticise*. Focus on the writer's *intended* effect on the audience, rather than on whether or not they successfully achieve this effect.
- Edit your work to ensure your writing is fluent and coherent, with accurate use of grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Refer to the criteria or performance descriptors provided by your teacher (in your SAC) or the exam criteria (in the final examination) for more information about the requirements of a high-level analysis.

## Preparing and planning your analysis

The first step in preparing your analysis is to gather information about each text. Begin by reading each text through once, taking notes on its main message, the broad shape of the argument, and the general persuasive approach. The second time you read, pay attention to the main points of argument, the supporting reasons and evidence, the order in which they appear, and the way in which specific word choices aim to elicit particular emotional reactions in the reader.

Use an information sheet like the one on the next page to record key details about each text. You can extend the table as needed, for example if there are more than two main arguments, or multiple images or visual elements.



## Information sheet

<b>Text details</b>	<b>Source of text</b>	Give the name of the newspaper, website or other place the text came from. Does this publication have a particular bias towards or investment in the issue under discussion?
	<b>Context</b>	Does the text concern an issue that is currently the focus of media attention? Is the text responding to a recent event or development?
	<b>Title of text</b>	Give the article headline, web page heading etc.
	<b>Text type</b>	Specify whether the text is an opinion piece, a blog entry, a cartoon etc.
	<b>Writer</b>	Give the name of the writer of the text.
<b>Main contention/tone</b>	<b>Writer's position or associations (if relevant)</b>	How might the writer's background and associations affect their opinions? Do they have a personal or professional connection to the issue?
	<b>Main contention</b>	Re-write the writer's contention in your own words.
	<b>Main tone</b>	Identify the main tone of text and any place at which the tone changes significantly.
	<b>Words/phrases that contribute to this tone</b>	Identify three or four examples of language choices that help to create the main tone/s.
<b>First main argument</b>	<b>Structure of the argument</b>	How is the argument structured? For instance, are supporting points presented in order, from the weakest to the strongest; does the writer start by rejecting opposing views before presenting their own? What is the effect of this sequence?
	<b>First main argument</b>	Identify the writer's first main argument.
	<b>Supporting reasons/evidence</b>	Identify the supporting reasons and/or evidence the writer provides for their first main argument.
	<b>Persuasive techniques</b>	Identify the main persuasive techniques used to present the first argument.
	<b>Language examples</b>	Select one or two persuasive words or phrases used to present the first argument.
<b>Second main argument</b>	<b>Intended effect on the reader</b>	Identify the effect the writer's argument and language choices are intended to have on the reader.
	<b>Second main argument</b>	Identify the writer's second main argument.
	<b>Supporting reasons/evidence</b>	Identify the supporting reasons and/or evidence the writer provides for their second main argument.
	<b>Persuasive techniques</b>	Identify the main persuasive techniques used to present the second argument.
	<b>Language examples</b>	Select one or two persuasive words or phrases used to present the second argument.
<b>Visual material</b>	<b>Intended effect on the reader</b>	Identify the effect the writer's argument and language choices are intended to have on the reader.
	<b>Accompanying visual material</b>	What type of text is it (e.g. photograph, cartoon, diagram, table, graph)? Who created the image? Do they have a particular stake in the issue?
	<b>Features of visual material</b>	Consider such features as colour, size and any associated text.
<b>Intended effect on the reader</b>		Identify the intended effect/s on the reader of the choices made by the creator of the visual material.

## Create a plan

The next step in writing your analysis is to plan your essay, drawing on the information sheet/s you have prepared. Use the outline below as a guide to what to include in your introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion.

### Introduction

- Give details of the titles, text types, writers or creators, and sources of each text.
- Outline each writer's main contention in your own words.
- Identify the main tone of each text.
- Comment on the main persuasive strategies used in each text.
- You may include a comment on the overall structure of each text.

### Body paragraphs

- The body of your analysis should consist of four to five paragraphs. Each paragraph might focus on a different text, or you might compare multiple texts within each paragraph. (See page 203 for more information on structuring your analysis.)
- Regardless of which approach you choose, use the acronym ATEE as a guide to what to include in your paragraphs.
  - ▶ Argument – identify the writer's (or writers') argument/s. *What* are they saying?
  - ▶ Techniques – identify the argument/s and persuasive language techniques used by the writer/s to present their argument. *How* are they saying it?
  - ▶ Examples – give examples, using short quotations.
  - ▶ Effect – analyse the effect the writer or writers intend to produce.
- Use linking words so that your sentences and paragraphs flow smoothly. (See the table and activity on page 202 for more on linking words and phrases.)

### Conclusion

- Comment on the overall or cumulative effects of each writer's use of argument and language.
- If you are analysing more than one media text, include comments that compare/contrast the use of argument and language in the texts.
- Do not give your own point of view on the issue, or your opinion on which media text is the most persuasive.

## Strategies for effective writing

This section contains guidelines and strategies for writing your analysis. To complete the activities below, select an article on an issue you are studying, or refer to the opinion piece on pages 163–5.

### Writing about persuasive techniques

Varying your sentence structure helps to create a well-written, fluent analysis. The following strong sentence openings can be adapted to use for the text/s you are analysing, to give you a variety of ways to analyse persuasive techniques.

Appealing to a sense of justice, the writer argues ...
The use of reason and logic, supported by evidence and statistics, is intended to position the reader to ...
Reference to well-known environmental organisations is intended to convey to the reader ...
The use of a slippery-slope argument, delivered in highly emotive language, is aimed at rousing the reader's ...
Citing research on the issue suggests to the reader that ...
Establishing her credentials at the outset, the writer aims to ...
In this appeal to tradition and custom, the reader is encouraged to ...
Beginning with an individual example before moving to a discussion of general principles positions the reader to feel that ...
The use of emotive language such as ... is designed to evoke fear/a sense of urgency/outrage in the reader ...
By stating his main contention firmly at the outset, the writer establishes that ...
Invoking the popular stereotype of ..., the writer intends ...
The positive/negative connotations of the words/phrases ... contribute to a depiction of ...
When the writer declares that ..., the reader is positioned to feel ...
By relying heavily on repeated <i>ad hominem</i> attacks, the writer conveys the impression that ...

**Example:** Invoking the popular stereotype of the untrustworthy used-car salesperson, the writer intends to suggest that the minister is being dishonest.

#### PRACTISE WRITING ABOUT PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Identify three examples of persuasive language in the text you are analysing. Drawing on the sentence starters above, write a sentence analysing each example.

ACTIVITY

**WRITING ABOUT TONE**

Writing about tone enables you to focus on how the writer is presenting their argument. Remember to explain how a particular choice of tone or shift in tone is intended to affect the audience.

Use the following sentence starters as a guide to writing effectively about tone.

The writer's ... tone supports their argument that ...
The writer's ... tone is intended to highlight ...
In a ... tone, the writer ...
The writer's attitude towards ... is clear from his ... tone, which ...
The use of a ... tone communicates the writer's ... to the audience, positioning them to feel ...
In order to reassure/provoke/amuse the audience, the writer uses a ... tone.
The ... tone encourages the audience to ...
The tone shifts to ... as the writer goes on to ...
This shift in tone positions the audience to ...
The change in the writer's tone, from ... to ...., signals a shift in their argument.

**Example:** The writer's use of a strident, aggressive tone communicates her anger to the reader, positioning them to feel that the issue warrants outrage.

**ACTIVITY****PRACTISE WRITING ABOUT TONE**

1. Using one of the sentence starters above as the basis, write a sentence analysing the main tone in a media text you are analysing.
2. Does the writer's tone shift at any point? Write a sentence that explains why the tone changes at this point, and the intended effect on the reader.

**Writing about argument and language working together**

Your analysis requires you to consider how language is used to present an argument, and how argument and language techniques work together to position the reader to accept a point of view. Often, certain arguments and approaches to argument are associated with particular language techniques. For example, an appeal to a sense of justice might be supported by reason and logic, while an *ad hominem* attack will often rely on hyperbole and emotive language.

The following verbs are useful for writing about the language in which a writer **delivers** their argument.

The writer's use of [language/technique] ...

*advances, bolsters, develops, enhances, fortifies, makes plausible/relevant, promotes, reinforces, strengthens, supports, sustains, underscores*

their argument that ...

**Example:** The writer's use of hyperbole **underscores** his argument that the decision will have far-reaching and dangerous consequences.

When writing about language used to rebut an opposing argument you can structure your sentence in the same way, using terms from the word bank below for rejecting a point of view.

The writer ...

*attacks, condemns, contradicts, counters, criticises, denigrates, dismisses, disputes, impugns, mocks, negates, rebuts, refutes, rejects, repudiates, takes issue with, undermines*

[the opposing opinion].

**Example:** The writer **dismisses** the claim that lives will be at risk as 'exaggerated' and 'melodramatic'.

### PRACTISE WRITING ABOUT ARGUMENT AND LANGUAGE TOGETHER

#### ACTIVITY

1. Identify connections between the writer's argument and the language they use to present it in the text you are analysing.
2. Using the sentence starters above, write two strong sentences analysing the way in which the writer's language choices support their argument.

## Writing about structure

The structure of an argument is an important aspect of its persuasiveness. Writers make strategic choices about the following elements of the structure of their piece.

- **Placement of the main contention.** Is the main contention clearly stated, or only implied? Does the writer declare their stance at the beginning of their piece, or do they examine both sides of an issue before coming to a conclusion? How does the placement of the main contention affect the reader's response to the argument?
- **Use of headings, subheadings, lists, tables and charts.** What does the heading or headline suggest about the topic, the writer's point of view and/or their main approach to the issue? Do subheadings indicate a logical structure or an examination of different angles on an issue? Are figures presented in the form of charts or graphs to convey an impression of objectivity?

**Order of reasons. Does the writer present ...**

to weakest? Or do they save their most convincing point till last to leave the reader with a strong impression? Where do they place their rebuttal or opposing arguments and viewpoints?

- **Shifts in tone.** A change in a writer's tone may signal the shift to a different approach in their argument. For example, the text might begin with an anecdote presented in a humorous tone, designed to relax the audience and establish a rapport, before moving to a more serious tone that works with the presentation of evidence and statistics to support their point of view.

Use the following sentence starters as a guide to writing about structure.

- |  |
|--|
| The use of subheadings and bulleted lists is reminiscent of a report, inclining the reader to feel ...   |
| The writer begins by listing particular examples, before moving into a discussion of the general ideas underlying them, encouraging the reader to feel that ...                      |
| The writer uses a series of rhetorical questions carefully designed to elicit positive responses from the reader, thus preparing them to accept his conclusion that ...              |
| The writer summarises her main arguments in the introduction, before discussing each in turn in the body paragraphs. The logical approach conveys an impression of the writer as ... |
| By beginning with an anecdote delivered in a conversational tone, the writer aims to establish ...   |

**Example:** The use of subheadings and bulleted lists is reminiscent of a report, inclining the reader to feel that the writer's position is based on sound, independent evidence and facts.

**ACTIVITY****PRACTISE WRITING ABOUT STRUCTURE**

1. Is the writer's main contention clearly stated in the text you are analysing? Where does it appear and how is it expressed? Why do you think the writer chose to present their contention in this way?
2. Identify two features of the argument's structure. How do these features contribute to the persuasive effect of the text?
3. Using the sentence starters above, write a sentence for each structural feature you identified in question 2.

**Writing about visual material**

Images often use persuasive techniques, such as emotional appeals, just as written texts do. However, instead of analysing how the words and sentences work, you are analysing the effect of visual language and how it positions the audience.

Usually an image is selected to support the accompanying text. Consider the way in which the writer's point of view is strengthened by the image and the relationship between written and visual elements. In some cases, an image might offer a contrasting or even contradictory viewpoint.

Refer to the table below for some useful words and phrases to compare and contrast the persuasive effects of images with those of written texts.

To express similarity	To express differences
<p>The image ...</p> <p><i>supports, reinforces, echoes, backs, reiterates, endorses, seconds, bolsters, upholds, confirms, corroborates, consolidates</i></p> <p>... the point of view expressed in the article.</p>	<p>The image ...</p> <p><i>undermines, contradicts, conveys an alternative message to, places pressure on, counters, belies, challenges, calls into question, disputes, negates, opposes, repudiates</i></p> <p>... the point of view expressed in the article.</p>

### PRACTISE WRITING ABOUT VISUAL MATERIAL

Refer to any visual material that accompanies a text of your choice. You could also refer to the images accompanying the articles on pages 156, 158, 163, 169 or 190–1.

1. Does the image support or contradict the argument put forward by the writer of the article? Write a sentence relating the point of view expressed in the image to that expressed in the written text. Use one of the verbs from the table above.
2. How does the image convey a point of view? Identify three features of the image that contribute to the expression of a point of view on the issue.
3. Write a short paragraph analysing the intended effects on the audience of the features you identified in question 2.

ACTIVITY

### Using linking words

Use appropriate linking words to connect your sentences and paragraphs; this will help to make your writing flow smoothly and give your analysis cohesion. Try using some of the examples below.

By contrast, ...	However, ...	On the other hand, ...
Conversely, ...	In addition, ...	Similarly, ...
Furthermore, ...	Moreover, ...	Therefore, ...
Just as ...	Whereas ...	While ...

### PRACTISE USING LINKING WORDS

Refer back to your responses to the activities on pages 198 and above, on writing about persuasive techniques and writing about images.

1. Turn two of your sentences about persuasive techniques into a short paragraph by using linking words to create smooth transitions between your ideas.
2. Next, create a fluent transition between this paragraph and the paragraph you wrote about an image in question 3, above, by using an appropriate linking word or phrase that expresses the relationship between the text and the image.

ACTIVITY

## Approaches to analysing two or more media texts

There are two main ways to approach an analysis of multiple media texts – the ‘block’ approach and the integrated approach.

- The **block approach** involves analysing each text individually, in separate paragraphs. Comparisons of the use of argument and persuasive language in the texts are made mainly in the introduction and the final paragraph or two. However, in your analysis of the second or third text you might make brief comparisons with an argument or language technique you discussed earlier in relation to one of the other texts.
- The **integrated approach** involves incorporating comparison of the texts into each paragraph of your analysis.

### Use the language of comparison

Whichever approach you take, you will need to use words and phrases that enable you to compare and contrast the media texts. In particular, your analysis will identify similarities and differences in their use of argument and persuasive language. The word bank of linking words on the previous page provides useful vocabulary for making these comparisons. These words can be used within a paragraph, or at the beginning of a body paragraph to make the transition from analysing one piece to analysing the next.

The following sentence starters and model sentences can also be used to compare the ways in which two or more writers use argument and language.

To express similarities between texts	To express differences between texts
Like Writer X, Writer Y also ...	Unlike Writer X, Writer Y ...
In the same way that Writer X relies on ..., Writer Y also uses ...	While Writer X relies on ..., Writer Y takes a more ... approach.
Both Writer X and Writer Y use ...	Writer X and Writer Y use contrasting techniques ...
Writer X and Writer Y approach the issue from a similar perspective.	Writer X and Writer Y approach the issue from very different perspectives.
Writer X and Writer Y agree that ...	Writer X disagrees with Writer Y on the issue of ...

**Example:** While Writer X relies on reason and logic to present her point of view, Writer Y takes an approach based more on emotional appeals that target the reader’s sympathy.

## Sample SAC responses

This section contains three media texts – a blog post, a comment and an advertisement – on the issue of ‘slacktivism’ or the practice of showing support for social causes by ‘liking’ or sharing material on social media.

Read the annotated texts below, then read the two sample analyses on pages 207–11.

- The first analysis takes the block approach to constructing an analytical essay: each media text is analysed separately, with comparison of the texts mostly confined to the introduction and conclusion.
- The second essay takes an integrated approach to analysis, with a comparison of all three texts developed in each paragraph.

**I Get It: You Don't Like Slacktivism. Now Shut Up. Only Don't.**

1 Direct address to the audience ('you') contributes to a casual, friendly tone; examples of 'slacktivism' likely to be familiar to the internet-savvy audience of the blog reinforce an impression of the writer as engaging and relatable.

2 'I can understand' acknowledges the opposing point of view, and aims to mollify sceptics sufficiently to prepare them to reconsider their preconceived views.

3 Acknowledgment of the downsides of slacktivism not only evokes the reader's sympathy but also positions them to view Rosmarin as speaking from a position of experience.

4 Clear and firm statement of the writer's main contention.

5 Case-based evidence encourages the reader to view Rosmarin's argument as being grounded in objective fact as well as passion.

You see it in the aftermath of any viral phenomenon created to bring social awareness. From the green avatars on Twitter for Iranian democracy (hey, remember that?) to the ALS ice bucket challenge and now to the rainbowed Facebook profile pictures. You will hear one word over and over and over again, used with enough venom to make you want to close down your social media accounts: Slacktivism.<sup>①</sup>

For those playing the home game, slacktivism is when people do something online in support of a certain cause or event, such as sign a petition or share a news article, that requires little time and/or thought. A lot of people consider it a useless endeavour and tend to have some less-than-kind statements about those who do it.

Now, I can understand some of the criticism of the rainbow filters on Facebook.<sup>②</sup> It's easy to be in support of something after the fact, after the Supreme Court ruled in favour – and long after public opinion became more in favour of the cause. For some, it can even be seen as disrespectful, especially if they had spent their whole life afraid of displaying the rainbow flag for fear of retaliation.

And I really do get the criticism of slacktivism. It's frustrating when the online attention does not match the real life work. I've been there as well, using social media to promote a local event or fundraiser. I'd get a good number of 'likes' but very few real world reactions. Gee, it's great that you like what we're trying to do, but clicking that four-letter word and dropping off some canned goods are two totally separate actions.<sup>③</sup>

But here's the thing: slacktivism actually does something.<sup>④</sup>

Now, was more attention spent on social media popularity and very cold water during the ice bucket challenge? Yes. However, on top of an awe-inspiring \$100 million in donations, many people learned about a very frightening disease for the first time.<sup>⑤</sup> For others, it drew

(6) Emotive adjectives 'awe-inspiring'.

how long. It informed an incredible number of people and drew awareness to the disease. And awareness is a beautiful thing.<sup>(6)</sup>

Awareness of net neutrality is arguably the main reason why we still have an open and free internet. And people learned about this through said slacktivism. Through people clicking that five-letter word – 'share' – on Facebook, whether it was a YouTube video of John Oliver explaining net neutrality or an online petition against it. It was through these 'armchair activists' and the viral online trends that created the necessary attention and awareness and a very loud public opinion on the matter.

When everyone is involved – not just those who spend their time on social issues, but those who spend their time on Facebook – it gets just a little bit easier to get what needs to get accomplished, accomplished.

More awareness of the fight for equal rights means it is going to be a little harder for municipalities and companies to infringe upon said rights.<sup>(7)</sup> And to deride the Facebook profile pictures is to overlook the incredible support it is giving those who once felt like they were completely unsupported. It might be the 'in' thing right now, another trend in an ever-evolving world of viral phenomena, but I will gladly take the latest 'trend' when that trend promotes equality and love.

I will gladly take a trend where people can come together for something positive. I don't care how much it dips into the 'slacktivism' category.

But here's the critical part, cynics of slacktivism: don't stop saying what you're saying. Because awareness really does only get us so far.

It is a beautiful sight to see people come together over a cause, even if it's as effortless as sharing a video or changing your profile picture. There is nothing I love seeing go viral quite like a social movement. Don't give me your blue-and-black (or is it white-and-gold?) dress. Don't give me '15 Things You Totes Do With Your BFF!!!!' I love seeing my Facebook and Twitter feeds flooded with something that can bring a little more peace, equality, or justice in this world.<sup>(8)</sup>

But that is only the start.

So cynics: keep speaking out against it. While you will be singing to the choir to some (and deeply annoying others), there are a few you will light a fire underneath. A few who will feel guilty over their slacktivism, a few who will realise they need to do more, and a few who will just be desperate to prove you wrong. A few who will get involved with their community, make more intelligent choices about what they buy and who they vote for, or simply donate something that amounts to more than the two seconds it takes to 'like' a post.<sup>(9)</sup>

It won't be everybody. It won't even be a lot of bodies. But it will be some.

And as much as the cynics of the cynics of slacktivism might disagree, your vocality is continuing to draw awareness to whatever cause you are talking about. And that is key: change can only come when people care. When people have an emotional response to something. A cause or social issue dipping under the radar is the kiss of death.<sup>(10)</sup>

So I get it. You hate slacktivism. Now shut up. Only don't. Don't you dare stop. Ever.

Abby Rosmarin, *The Huffington Post*

with clicktivism.

- (7) Uses logic to indicate broader and subtler effects of clicktivism, positioning the reader to feel that its value cannot necessarily be measured in dollars.
- (8) References to peace, equality and justice, with their highly positive connotations, associate clicktivism with virtue and contribute to an optimistic tone.
- (9) Repetition of 'a few' creates a rhetorical momentum and conveys the notion of people coming together, emphasising the cumulative effect of social media action.
- (10) Unites clicktivism critics and proponents through the argument that criticism is not only acceptable but admirable; provided it is done purposefully.

## “Comments

Clicking 'like' on a social media site is instant, painless, and almost completely useless, as CarePlan's recent advertising campaign makes clear.<sup>11</sup>

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# Follow us, like us or retweet us so we can supply **ZERO** children with life-saving medications!



Likes are great!  
But medication costs  
money. A donation of  
\$5 could save the lives  
of 12 children.



Research shows that public displays of support for a cause actually make people *less* likely to take real, meaningful action.<sup>13</sup> People sign online petitions and share awareness campaigns because it makes them feel good. It identifies them publicly as a 'moral' person and costs them nothing. Defenders of 'clicktivism' argue that at the very least it raises awareness of issues we might otherwise not get to hear about. But what good is awareness if it's never translated into action?<sup>14</sup> It just leads to a bunch of would-be do-gooders smugly patting themselves on the back for their 'contribution' while the environment continues to degrade, animals continue to be tortured, political activists remain imprisoned and children continue to starve.

If our activism begins and ends with a 'retweet', we're as guilty of perpetuating social injustice as perpetrators. If we're aware but don't act, we are complicit. Clicktivism not only permits laziness, cowardice and false feelings of superiority, it encourages us to feel good about it.<sup>15</sup> If an organisation the size and reputation of CarePlan tells us 'likes' are useless, we'd do well to listen.

George



Outlines the main issue, the source of the texts, the contentions of the writers and the main persuasive strategies used by each to present their points of view.

## SAMPLE ANALYSIS 1: THE BLOCK APPROACH

- Three very different perspectives, delivered in highly contrasting tones, on the issue of 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism' – that is, the showing of support for a cause via social media – are presented by opinion writer Abby Rosmarin, commenter George, and the international children's charity CarePlan. Rosmarin's opinion piece, published on the news website of The Huffington Post, is broadly supportive of clicktivism while acknowledging its shortcomings, and she presents a friendly, relatable persona through the use of informal and emotive language, to encourage the reader to share her viewpoint. Commenter George builds up a strongly negative picture of clicktivism and those who engage in it through attacking language and a cynical, angry tone. He aligns himself with CarePlan by including in his comment an ad of theirs suggesting that social media sharing provides no practical support to their cause.

The headline to Rosmarin's opinion piece addresses those sceptical of clicktivism directly, identifying them as her primary audience, reinforced by her repetition of the direct address 'you' throughout the piece. Phrases such as 'you see', 'you will hear' and 'remember that?' also contribute to a friendly, personable tone that shifts occasionally to familiar and firm ('don't stop saying what you're saying'; 'Now shut up. Only don't'). Rosmarin's main argument hinges on presenting criticisms of clicktivism as evidence in support of the fact that 'speaking out', whether to criticise clicktivism or in support of a cause, is a positive and helpful practice. In this way, she aims to get those sceptical of clicktivism on side; by encouraging them to continue to 'keep speaking out against it' she positions them to feel as though she and the 'cynics' share a common purpose.

Identifies a shift in tone and provides examples of phrases that contribute to it.

Examines a structuring strategy in terms of its likely effect on the reader.

- Rosmarin's first clear and firm statement in support of clicktivism does not appear until near the middle of her opinion piece. She arrives at it by way of extensive acknowledgement of the arguments of those who oppose the practice, emphasising her understanding of their position – 'I've been there' – and thereby inclining the reader to view her as reasonable and her position arrived at through experience, preparing them to accept her subsequent defence of the practice.

Analyses the way in which the writer supports her main contention with an extended argument strategy.

Identifies the way in which the writer constructs her argument in order to achieve a particular effect.

However, she counters this admission of clicktivism's shortcomings by going on to build up a highly positive view of the practice throughout the rest of the piece. She cites various causes, such as ALS and net neutrality, for which social media activity raised awareness, as evidence to rebut critics' charge that it doesn't help. She uses words with highly positive, aspirational connotations, such as 'peace', 'love', 'equality' and 'justice', to convey the good intentions of social media activists, positioning the reader to feel that to criticise activists would be to reject the noble values with which she associates them.

Identifies how the connotations of carefully selected words create positive associations in the reader's mind, aimed at making it difficult for them to sustain a critical attitude towards social media activists.

- From here, Rosmarin ties together her two main points – that some criticisms of slacktivism are justified and that nevertheless it has value – to develop her central argument that critics of the practice should recognise the usefulness of slacktivism but should not 'shut



Uses an appropriate linking phrase to transition to a discussion of the second text.

up' as their arguments are important to inciting action. Her language becomes more lyrical as she aims to enlist the reader in a shared view of clicktivism as a means to a greater end. She uses repetition – 'a few you will light a fire underneath', 'a few who will feel guilty', 'a few who will get involved' – which works together with earlier emotive language and her intimate tone ('I get it'; 'don't you dare stop') to act as a rallying cry for slacktivism critics to continue speaking out against slacktivism but with a revised aim of harnessing its power to create genuine change.

Effectively analyses the way in which several persuasive language techniques work together to support a major line of argument.

→ A contrasting approach to the issue of clicktivism is presented by a commenter on Rosmarin's article, George, and the CarePlan ad he includes in his post, both of which condemn social media support with varying degrees of forcefulness. George presents his opinion in an adamant and occasionally aggressive tone, revealed in his references to 'would-be do-gooders' who are 'lazy' and 'complicit' in perpetuating injustice. This scathing attack is supported by appeals to authority in the forms of the charity advertisement undermining clicktivism and the reference to 'research' indicating that social media activity actually discourages action. These forms of evidence imply a sound basis for the writer's position, encouraging the reader to align themselves with expert opinion.

George's rhetorical question 'But what good is awareness if it's never translated into action?' is a sharp dismissal of the argument that clicktivism is effective in drawing attention to causes. However, his argument goes further than simply characterising clicktivism as ineffective. In his final paragraph, he develops the broader point indicated by the 'research' mentioned early in the piece, that clicktivism lets activists 'off the hook' by encouraging them to substitute social media activity for genuine assistance. The reader is thus positioned to fear the negative consequences of clicktivism and therefore to reject it. This reaction is likely to be compounded by George's highly negative characterisation of clicktivists, who, he claims, are more concerned with the appearance than the practice of morality.

Demonstrates understanding of the way in which a supporting reason targets a particular emotional reaction in the reader.

Analyses the effect of a typographical feature of the text.

The CarePlan ad that George includes in his post to buttress his arguments directly addresses the reader with the statement in a large, bold font: 'Follow us, like us or retweet us so we can supply ZERO children with life-saving medications!' The size and style of the font → makes the message seem urgent and the point important. This firm declaration is accompanied by an image of a young child receiving an injection, surrounded by others offering support as well as the doctor. The photograph shows the need for material resources (such as medicine and needles), for which support in the form of money rather than 'likes' is necessary, evoking the reader's sympathy and protective feelings and thereby inclining them to want to offer practical support. This is underscored by the statement that five dollars could save the lives of twelve children, which suggests to the reader that they could make an important difference with a relatively small effort.

Effective discussion of the image and the ways in which particular features work together to appeal to the reader's sympathy.

Comparison of the main positions taken by the creator of each text and the ways in which they support their opinions occurs in the conclusion of the essay.

→ The three texts all take different positions on the issue of clicktivism but also demonstrate one area of broad agreement: that clicktivism must be accompanied by some other form of practical assistance to be truly valuable. Rosmarin's defence of its capacity to 'do something' is presented through emotive language and a friendly, sometimes humorous persona. George, commenting on her piece, denigrates social media support in a serious and aggressive tone, though he briefly adds the caveat that he is referring to clicktivism unaccompanied by action. The ad he includes to support his viewpoint likewise suggests clicktivism is not helpful on its own, but its humour and friendly tone make it closer to Rosmarin's approach.

Introduction summarises the main approaches and persuasive strategies used in each text to present a point of view.

## SAMPLE ANALYSIS 2: THE INTEGRATED APPROACH

Analyses the effect of a structural feature and a particular argument strategy (conceding points from the opposing side) in terms of the likely effect on a particular segment of the audience.

→ In a tone that shifts between conversational and earnest and emotional, Abby Rosmarin mounts an argument in favour of 'slacktivism', the derogatorily named practice of showing support for social causes on social media. A strongly worded contrasting perspective, delivered in a firm and occasionally sarcastic tone, is presented by commenter George, who supports his point of view with a CarePlan advertisement that relies on dry humour and surprise to convey the idea that social media 'likes' have little practical value.

Rosmarin begins by conceding some of the objections to slacktivism, acknowledging that, as critics point out, it 'requires little time and/or thought' and is seen by some as 'useless' and even 'disrespectful'. The use of such strong language from the other side of the debate – the word 'useless' directly echoes a descriptor used twice by commenter George, for example – works to disarm the reader, particularly if they are initially not inclined to share the writer's viewpoint. This concession to the opposing point of view is underlined by the writer's claim to have 'been there', that is, in the position of someone wanting 'real' action rather than 'likes' for a cause. This approach suggests that she is reasonable, preparing the reader to accept her opinion as considered and arising from experience. Her attempts to build rapport with the reader continue throughout the piece, demonstrated by an often informal and intimate tone: 'hey, remember that?'; 'Now shut up. Only don't.' ←

This concession to opposing arguments is immediately followed by an isolated sentence that rebuts the main opposing argument by declaring that the practice 'actually does something'. This contrasts starkly with CarePlan's tongue-in-cheek reference to 'zero' children receiving medication as a result of social media sharing. Rosmarin's technique of creating short, often single-sentence paragraphs consisting of firm assertions recurs throughout her opinion piece, serving to highlight important elements of her point of view and to create the impression that she is stating definitive truths. This is

Identifies a strategy used by the writer throughout the piece and gives an example of the language used to present it.

Demonstrates understanding of the way particular sentence structures and language choices work together to create an effect on the reader.

further reinforced by Rosmarin's use of modifiers such as 'really' and 'actually', which suggest that she is correcting common misconceptions about clicktivism with facts.

Both CarePlan and George similarly attempt to correct reader misconceptions, but do so in markedly contrasting ways. In this context, the CarePlan ad is being shared by George with readers of the news website; however, the ad's original intended audience is much broader. As a charity dependent on public goodwill for support, their criticism of slacktivism is implied rather than explicit and is softened by humour, so as not to alienate readers. On the other hand, as a commenter on a website, whose full name isn't printed, George is under no such constraints, and he presents his opinion in a much more forceful manner and a caustic tone, demonstrated in his scathing references to 'do-gooders smugly patting themselves on the back'. George attacks such people directly, arguing that they are motivated by concern for their own image in the eyes of others rather than any genuine wish to help.

By contrast, the CarePlan ad, which mildly points out that money is needed to purchase medication without entirely dismissing the good intentions of those who offer social media support, suggests a view of these people that is closer to Rosmarin's. CarePlan's position is supported by an image of a young child receiving an injection, aimed at evoking sympathy and a desire to offer practical help.

Rosmarin similarly relies on evoking reader sympathy. She supports her declaration in favour of slacktivism with evidence drawn from the example of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, and uses emotive language with a particular reliance on hyperbolic adjectives, such as 'awe-inspiring', 'beautiful' and 'incredible'. Rosmarin thus appeals to both the reader's intellect and their emotions, positioning them to feel hopeful about what social media activity can achieve.

This shift from acknowledging the criticisms levelled at slacktivism to praising its worth is mirrored by Rosmarin's subtle redefinition of the term. From the headline, she begins by referring to 'slacktivism', but soon changes this to the less critical 'armchair activists' and 'viral phenomena'. That these terms aren't entirely positive indicates the middle ground the writer is taking on the argument: that 'slacktivism' serves a useful purpose but should not be the endpoint of activism.

George, on the other hand, concedes no use for social media-based activism. Rather he paints a graphic and disturbing image of 'useless' activists congratulating themselves for doing something that costs 'nothing' – an echo of the 'zero' in the CarePlan ad – apparently oblivious to the fact that 'the environment continues to degrade, animals continue to be tortured, political activists remain imprisoned and children continue to starve'. Linking activists' social media activity to a string of tragedies creates an association in the reader's mind between social media activism and highly negative social consequences, positioning them to feel that not only is such activity not helpful, it may in fact be dangerous. This is quite distinct from CarePlan's subtly made point that 'likes' are not equal to financial contributions.

Shows awareness of both the repurposing of the CarePlan ad by George, and how their distinct audiences shape the different ways in which each text presents a similar viewpoint.

Transitions effectively to a comparison of Rosmarin's opinion piece and the CarePlan advertisement.

Closely examines the way in which particular language choices support an argument and contribute to its development.

Identifies the broad aims of the writer in terms of appealing to the reader, and how these affect her choices with regard to argument structure and language.

Discusses the similarities and differences between the main positions in George's comment and the CarePlan advertisement.



Shifts from discussing the main differences between the writers' tactics to recognising a fundamental similarity in the conclusions reached by each.

Summarises the different approaches taken by the writers and notes the similarities of their conclusions.

George develops this argument when he refers to 'we' being 'guilty' and 'complicit' in the continuation of injustice. His aim is to rouse the reader's shame and cause them to question their own participation in social media support. His unequivocal stance condemns all who practise social media activism, with just one 'escape clause' for the uncomfortable reader – his criticism only holds if these people 'don't act'. In so saying, he ends by conceding Rosmarin's main point – that social media activism should never be the only form of activism practised by any individual, a view also implicitly supported by the CarePlan ad, which does not condemn clicktivism but merely points out that more is needed to make a genuine difference.

Like George, Rosmarin also uses inclusive language to align the reader to her viewpoint; however, she uses it in a more positive way, to develop an extended appeal to group loyalty with references to 'we' and 'us' and the use of words with positive connotations of unity, such as 'together', 'community' and 'share'. From her reassurance to sceptical readers that she has 'been there', to her assumption of a common cause, Rosmarin attempts to draw the reader into a shared sense of purpose, thereby positioning them to feel aligned with her and her views.

The cynical tone and attacking language used by George to argue against the usefulness of social media activism is quite distinct from the mild humour of the CarePlan ad and also Rosmarin's moderate approach to mounting a case, which is dependent on anecdotal evidence and emotional appeals. Ultimately, though, all three texts → arrive at a point of view that is broadly shared. While George is highly condemnatory of 'clicktivism', the CarePlan ad more neutral, and Rosmarin mostly supportive, all three texts present the view that slacktivism is only genuinely useful if it is accompanied by some other, more practical, form of action.

Notes the differing ways in which two writers employ similar techniques, and closely analyses specific language choices that contribute to an overall aim.