

Visual language

Visual elements are crucial components of nearly all persuasive texts, whether they are in print newspapers, on television news programs or on a website. They include images (still or moving) as well as design elements such as typography, colour, layout, borders and backgrounds.

Images

Images have a strong and immediate impact on readers and audiences of persuasive texts in various ways. They can:

- visually transport the reader to a story's location
- give a sense of the appearance and personality of key individuals
- illustrate the central elements of a story, enabling them to be quickly understood.

Often, the real meaning and persuasive effects of images come from their association with an accompanying text. Images can reinforce or add to the viewpoint presented in a written or spoken text; or they can suggest a contrasting viewpoint, perhaps making the reader regard certain statements in a more critical light.

Colour

Colour is an important element of almost all images in today's media and contributes significantly to their impact on readers. Colours have strong connotations and symbolic meanings. These are some possible meanings and persuasive effects of colour:

- ▶ **white** to suggest purity
 - can be used to identify a person or object as good, perhaps deserving our admiration or approval
- ▶ **green** to suggest nature or to imply something is natural
 - can be used to identify something as worthwhile since it is healthy or good for the environment
- ▶ **red** to suggest danger, anger, passion
 - can be used to identify something as a threat to which we need to respond
- ▶ **black** to suggest seriousness
 - can be used to identify an issue as important and worthy of attention

Composition and technical features

Apart from colour, there are several important features of any image that help to convey information and ideas as well as to achieve an emotional impact on the viewer. Use the features and questions in the table below as starting points for your analysis of an image.

Feature	Questions to consider
Main subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the image depict a clear subject, such as a person or object?• Does the main subject take up a large proportion of the image, or is there a balance between the subject and the background?• Can you see all of the main subject or just a part (e.g. a person's face)?
Angle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the main subject seen from an angle (such as below, above or side-on), or straight on?
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much background detail is shown?• How does the background add to your understanding of the main subject?
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which elements of the image are in focus: everything in the frame, or just the main subject?• Which elements are blurry and indistinct?• What does the use of focus suggest is the most important or significant element in the image?
Light	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the subject well lit or in darkness?• Is the light soft or harsh?• Are there shadows or dark areas in the image?
Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the image contain strong contrasts, such as between light and dark, or between different textures?
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there negative spaces (in which no object appears) as well as positive spaces? If so, what is the balance between them, and what is the effect of the negative spaces?
Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is included in the image?• What is excluded – that is, if you were present in this scene, what else might you have been able to see?

Design features

The appearance of text on a page or screen can affect the reader's emotional response and interpretation of its meaning. Look for the following design features in any written persuasive text and think about how they influence you.

- **Headings and pull-out boxes** focus the reader's attention on certain points, giving them extra significance and weight; they can also establish the tone and influence the reader's response to the whole piece.
- **Borders and backgrounds** can be highly emotive even while being unobtrusive. A pale green background with a soft texture can have a calming, reassuring effect; heavy lines, sharp angles and strong reds and blacks are much more dramatic and attention-grabbing, perhaps alarming the reader.
- **Fonts** vary widely and can have some specific connotations and associations with certain text types. A graphic designer will select the font or fonts for a text based on the intended audience, purpose and context. For example, a traditional font such as **Times New Roman** is often used in newspapers, and can suggest authority and reliability. More contemporary fonts such as **Helvetica** convey a sense of being modern and up-to-date; they can enable texts to appear more informal and less serious.

- **Font styles** can draw the reader's attention to certain pieces of text by:
 - ▶ making them **larger**
 - ▶ making them **bold**
 - ▶ using *italics*
 - ▶ using **LARGE** or **SMALL** capitals.

Issues in the media

An issue is a controversial subject with at least two opposing sides that is debated in a range of media texts. It provokes various opinions that present and support different points of view. An issue can be debated intensively for a short period – just a few weeks or months – or it can recur regularly or intermittently over longer periods, even years.

How do issues start?

Generally issues start when there is a trigger that arouses public interest, such as the following situations or events.

- A high-profile person promotes a cause and generates interest in that issue.
- A change of government policy affects people's security or general welfare.
- A catastrophic event occurs: this might highlight the nation's vulnerability.
- An incident takes place that has the potential to disadvantage a number of people.
- A major report is released.
- A provocative opinion presented on television or online, or in an article published in a newspaper, puts an issue on the public agenda.

Stakeholders, bias and point of view

Any major media issue flourishes because it provokes strongly held beliefs and opinions. The clearest points of view will be those strongly in favour of, or adamantly against, the issue. For example, on the question 'Should Australia have a new national flag?' people fall broadly into two main groups: 'Yes, we should, as Australia is a proudly independent country and needs a flag that reflects its contemporary identity', or 'No, we shouldn't, because the current flag represents our history and traditions'.

If we look at the attitudes and views of individuals either for or against a particular viewpoint on an issue, we will also find a broad range of points of view within each group. Because people have different backgrounds, attitudes and values, they bring to the debate different views, which they support with widely varied reasons.