Chapter 10. Persuasion

This chapter is short in comparison to the other chapters you have read. That is because you will be expected to complete your critique this week. In the next chapter, **Developing a Convincing Argument**, you will need to apply this information and structures in developing your persuasive paper, the last essay form you will learn in this course.

10.1 The Purpose of Persuasion

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose of persuasion in writing

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion. The act of trying to persuade automatically implies more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An **argument** is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

Most people have strong views on **controversial topics** (ones that inspire extreme points of view or opinions) and are often very willing to share those strong views. However, imagine you are having a discussion with someone who is only willing to share a particular point of view, ignoring yours, which may be in opposition. The ideas presented by that person would be very narrow, almost as if the person has tunnel vision and is merely expressing a personal opinion. If that person does provide you with facts, they may often be skewed or not from a credible source. After the discussion, there is only a slight chance you would be convinced of the other person's point of view. You may have new ideas you had not considered before or a new perspective, but you would probably not be thoroughly convinced because that person has not made any attempt to present a well-rounded, fact-based point of view. This is why it is essential for you to not only provide your reader with strong, substantiated evidenced, but also to ensure you present an argument that looks at the topic from multiple angles.

Now, you may be asking yourself, "How can my argument be convincing if I present ideas contrary to my main point of view?" Well, while you need to concede there are other views different from your own, it is very important to show your reader you have thought about different angles and that the conclusions you have come to have been critically developed. This evidence of critical thinking will elevate your argument to a level so that your reader cannot really have any objections to. Also, when you look at the structures for persuasive writing, outlined in the next section, you will learn how you can rebut the possible objections you present, essentially smashing those contrary ideas and showing how your point of view is the convincing one.

Tip

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we engage in. On some level, we all want to be right, and we want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the right one.

10.2 The Structure of a Persuasive Essay

Learning Objectives

- Determine the structure of persuasion in writing
- Apply a formula for a classic persuasive argument

Writing a Persuasive Essay

You first need to choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Next, need to acknowledge and explain points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. You also should state the limits of your argument. This helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Be sure to make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated. Also, write in a style and tone that is appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice. Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis.

Structuring a Persuasive Essay

The formula below for organizing a persuasive essay may be one with which you are familiar. It will present a convincing argument to your reader because your discussion is well rounded and thorough, and you leave your audience with your point of view at the end. *Remember to consider each of these components in this formulaas sections instead of paragraphs because you will probably want to discuss multiple ideas backing up your point of view to make it more convincing.*

When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it im-

mediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading. For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are: *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

The Formula You will need to come up with objection points, but you will also need to think of direct rebuttals to each of those ideas. Remember to consult your outline as you are writing because you may need to double-check that you have countered *each* of the possible opposing ideas you presented.

Section 1: Introduction

Attention getter

Thesis (showing main and controlling ideas)

Background

Signposts (make sure you outline the structure your argument will follow: Pros Cons/Pros)

Section 2: (Multiple) Ideas in Support of Claim

Give a topic sentence introducing the point (showing main and controlling ideas)

Give explanations + evidence on first point

Make concluding statement summarizing point discussion (possibly transitioning to next supporting idea)

Repeat with multiple ideas in separate paragraphs

Section 3: Summary of (Some) Opposing Views

Give topic sentence explaining this paragraph will be opposing points of view to provide thorough, convincing argument

Present general summary of some opposing ideas

Present some *generalized* evidence

Provide brief concluding sentence for paragraph—transitioning into next rebuttal paragraph

Section 4: Response to Opposing Views

Give topic sentence explaining this paragraph/section **connects to or expands on previous paragraph**

[may recognize validity of some of points] then need to present how your ideas are stronger

Present evidence **directly countering/refutingideas** mentioned in previous section

Give concluding statement summarizing the **countering** arguments

¶Section 5: Conclusion

Restate your thesis

Summarize your discussion points

Leave the reader with a strong impression; do not waiver here

May provide a "call for action"

Tip

In a persuasive essay, the writer's point of view should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph in the topic sentence, which should contain the main idea of the paragraph and the writer's controlling idea.

10.3 Being Critical

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance and benefits of acknowledging opposing ideas
- Identify the importance of cautious use of tone in a persuasive essay
- Identify bias in writing
- Assess various rhetorical devices, including the use of *I*
- Distinguish between fact and opinion
- Understand the importance of visuals to strengthen arguments

In **Chapter 7: Sources: Choosing the Right Ones**, we discussed being critical when evaluating sources, the ideas presented in those sources, and how those ideas are presented. When writing a persuasive essay, you need to focus on the same elements, but you also need to ensure you are presenting an argument that considers other points of view on your topic; you need to acknowledge there are other angles, and you need to present ideas countering those objections in order to increase your chance at convincing your reader.

Style and Tone of Language

Just as with any essay, the way you write and the tone you use is very important to consider. Think back to the earlier mention of that one-sided argument. If you are talking with a person who uses aggressive and inflammatory words, are you more or less likely to listen to the whole argument and ultimately be convinced? If someone is waving his hands and swearing or yelling, the gestures and raised voice may actually distract you from what is being said. Also, when people are extremely animated in their discussions, their audience may become defensive if they do not agree with the ideas presented. In such a case, the audience may then respond in the same way, and no one ends up really hearing other points of view and will definitely not be convinced. Consider the same discussion, but imagine the original speaker being calm and controlled. Do you think you would be more likely to listen and consider the ideas? That is what often happens; the speaker also allows you to give your input and views, and together, you can arrive at a blend of ideas. While you may not be convinced to change your mind completely, the way the speaker presents the argument (calmly and substantively) creates an environment or situation where you are more open to discussion. This is the same when you write; if you choose inflammatory language not appropriate to your audience, the overall impact is almost "bloggish"—like someone ranting on a topic and just stating his or her opinion. This becomes a bigger issue if no substantive evidence or support is given for the discussion. The writer just seems like a radical expressing views, not someone you can use for credible support. In short, remember to choose your words carefully. While you will need to use assertive language to support your ideas, you need to choose objective words. How you make your argument more convincing is by:Using strong, peer-reviewed, and reliable evidence to back up your ideasPresenting and rebuttingat least one opposing idea

Acknowledging Opposing Ideas and Limits to Your Argument

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must be sure to acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus, it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your

own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word.

Acknowledging different points of view also fosters more credibility between you and the audience. They know from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space.

It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience. Your readers will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and they will trust your argument as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation alone cannot end these problems since guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might disagree with this writer's argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to the ideas. See **Table 10.1: Phrases of Concession** for some useful phrases of concession.

Table 10.1: Phrases of Concession

although	granted that	of course	still	though	yet

Bias in Writing

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly coloured clothes, or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

In your first assignment a number of weeks ago, you were asked to sit somewhere, make observations, and write both a positive and negative description of the same scene—or to show two angles of vision. The purpose of this exercise was to make it evident to you how easily bias and angles can appear even through the smallest words you choose to use in your writing. Choosing each word carefully is even more significant in a persuasive paper because, as already mentioned, you want your reader to view your presentation of ideas as logical and not just a tirade.

Using objective and neutral language and evidence and acknowledging you have a possible bias will help you present a well-rounded and developed argument.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful and reasonable address of opposing sides.

- **The strength of a personal bias** is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth and the better the final product will be.
- **The weakness of personal bias** is that it can take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using *I* too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

Fact and Opinion

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, 2 + 2 = 4. This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views, or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation must have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions, as experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience.

For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and vice versa.

In your writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

The Use of I in Writing

The use of *I* in writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can potentially have on your writing.

Be mindful of the use of *I* in your writing because it can make your argument sound overly biased, for two primary reasons:

Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader's attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of *I* is no different.

The insertion of *I* into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. *I* is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentence is bolded and underlined:

Smoking is bad. vs. **I** think smoking is bad.

In the first sentence, the rightful subject, *smoking*, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of *I* and *think* replaces *smoking* as the subject, which draws attention to *I* and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

You can use **Checklist 10.1 Developing Sound Arguments,** as you work on your persuasive essay.

Checklist 10.1 Developing Sound Arguments

Does my essay contain the following elements?

An engaging introduction

A reasonable, specific thesis that is able to be supported by evidence

A varied range of evidence from credible sources

Respectful acknowledgment and explanation of opposing ideas

A style and tone of language that is appropriate for the subject and audience

Acknowledgment of the argument's limits

A conclusion that will adequately summarize the essay and reinforce the thesis

Tip

The word *prove* is frequently used in the discussion of persuasive writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another proves the argument, but proving an argument is often not possible. No evidence proves a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is debatable. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported, explained, and persuaded.

Using Visual Elements to Strengthen Arguments

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. However, remember you want to use them to make a bigger impact for your reader, so you need to make sure they are:

- **Relevant and essential.** They should help your reader visualize your point.
- **Easy to follow.** The reader should not have to work too hard to understand.
- **Appropriate to audience, tone, and purpose.** Always keep the audience in mind.
- **Appropriately cited and referenced.** If you borrow from a source, be sure to include proper citations.
- **NOT disrespectful.** You want your writing to been seen as fair and non-biased.
- **NOT used too often.** They will become more of a distraction than a focal point if they are used too often

There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

- **Quantitative** visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if it is displayed graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.
- **Qualitative** visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often try to convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.

Writing at Work

When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get your idea across. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective timesaving tool. Quantitative visuals in business presentations serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing. They should make logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Quantitative visuals

should be pictures that might appeal to your audience's emotions. You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace.

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion.
- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- A thesis that expresses the opinion of the writer in more specific terms is better than one that is vague.
- It is essential that you address counterarguments and do so respectfully.
- It is helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.
- To persuade a skeptical audience, you need to use a wide range of evidence. Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence that you might use in explaining your point.
- Word choice and writing style should be appropriate for both your subject and your audience.
- You should let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.
- You should be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound more biased than it needs to.
- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- Opinions are personal views, or judgments, that cannot be proven.
- In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

10.4 Examples: Persuasive Essay

Learning Objectives

- Read two examples of persuasive essays on the same topic

EXAMPLE 1

Justice: Retribution or Restoration?

Every day when I pick up my newspaper I read about crime. What strikes me as tragic in these discussions is that the solutions which are proposed are simply more of the same: bigger threats, more punishment. Few people ask more basic questions about whether punishment ought to be our main concern. Even fewer seem genuinely concerned about victims and what they need.

Consequently, victims' needs and wishes continue to be ignored. Prisons are massively crowded, and the call for a return to the death penalty is back with a vengeance. The costs to us as taxpayers keep soaring.

Actually, there is good reason why we ignore victims and focus instead on more punishment for offenders. It has to do with our very definitions of what constitutes crime and what justice entails.

If you have been a victim, you know something about the fear, the anger, the shame, the sense of violation that this experience generates. You know something about the needs that result: needs for repayment, for a chance to talk, for support, for involvement, for an experience that feels like justice. Unfortunately, you may also know from personal experience how little help, information and involvement you can expect from the justice process.

If you have experienced crime, you know for a fact that you yourself are the victim, and you would like to be remembered in what happens thereafter. But the legal system does not define the offence that way and does not assume that you have a central role.

Legally, the essence of the crime lies in breaking a law rather than the actual damage done. More importantly, the official victim is the state, not you. It is no accident, then, that victims and their

needs are so often forgotten: they are not even part of the equation, not part of the definition of the offence!

When a crime occurs, the state as victim decides what must be done, and the process of deciding focuses primarily on two questions: "Is the person guilty? If so, how much punishment does he or she deserve?" Our definitions of crime and justice, then, might be summarized like this:

Crime is a violation of the state and its laws.

Justice establishes blame and administers pain through a contest between offender and state.

This way of viewing crime might be called "retributive justice." It has little place for victims, uses what some scholars have called a "battle model" for settling things, and, because it is centred so heavily on establishing blame, looks primarily to the past rather than the future. It assumes that punishment or pain, usually in the form of a prison term, is the normal outcome.

This process concentrates almost exclusively on offenders, but, ironically, does not hold them accountable. To be accountable, offenders ought to be helped to understand and acknowledge the human consequences of their actions. Then they ought to be encouraged to take responsibility for what happens thereafter, including taking steps to right the wrong. Yet this rarely happens; indeed, the justice process discourages responsibility. Thus neither victim nor offender is offered the kind of opportunities that might aid healing and resolution for both.

But what is the alternative? How should we understand crime and justice?

An alternate understanding of crime and justice might look something like this:

Crime is a violation of people and their relationships.

Justice identifies needs and obligations so that things can be made right through a process which encourages dialogue and involves both victims and offenders.

A restorative approach to justice would understand that the essence of crime is a violation of people and of harmonious relations between them. Instead of asking first of all, "Who 'done' it? What should they get?" (and rarely going beyond this), a restorative approach to justice would ask "Who has been hurt? What can be done to make things right, and whose responsibility is it?" True justice would have as its goals restoration, reconciliation, and responsibility rather than retribution.

Restorative justice would aim to be personal. Insofar as possible, it would seek to empower victims and offenders to be involved in their own cases and, in the process, to learn something about one another. As in the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP), which operates in many communities in the U.S. and Canada, when circumstances permit, justice would offer victims and

offenders an opportunity to meet in order to exchange information and decide what is to be done. Understanding of one another, acceptance of responsibility, healing of injuries, and empowerment of participants would be important goals.

Is restorative approach practical? Can it work? The experience of the VORP suggests that while there are limitations and pitfalls, restoration and reconciliation can happen, even in some tough cases. Moreover, our own history points in this direction. Through most of western history, most crimes were understood to be harms done to people by other people. Such wrongs created obligations to make right, and the normal process was to negotiate some sort of restitution agreement. Only in the past several centuries did our present retributive understanding displace this more reparative approach.

If our ancestors could view crime and justice this way, why can't we?

Adapted from: Zehr, H. (n.d.). *Justice: Retribution or Restoration?* Retrieved from: http://www.peaceworkmagazine.org/pwork/0499/049910.htm

EXAMPLE 2

Retribution

Retribution is perhaps the most intuitive—and the most questionable—aim of punishment in the criminal law. Quite contrary to the idea of rehabilitation and distinct from the utilitarian purposes of restraint and deterrence, the purpose of retribution is actively to injure criminal offenders, ideally in proportion with their injuries to society, and so expiate them of guilt.

The impulse to do harm to someone who does harm to you is older than human society, older than the human race itself (go to the zoo and watch the monkey cage for a demonstration.) It's also one of the most powerful human impulses—so powerful that at times it can overwhelm all else. One of the hallmarks of civilization is to relinquish the personal right to act on this impulse, and transfer responsibility for retribution to some governing body that acts, presumably, on behalf of society entire. When society executes retribution on criminals by means of fines, incarceration, or death, these punishments are a social expression of the personal vengeance the criminal's victims feel, rationally confined (it is hoped) to what is best for society as a whole.

While "it's natural" tends not to carry much weight in the criminal law, "it's morally right" can. Moral feelings and convictions are considered, even by the criminal law, to be some of the most powerful and binding expressions of our humanity. In binding criminal trial juries to restrict guilty verdicts to situations of the highest certainty, "beyond a reasonable doubt" is also often described as "to a moral certainty." It is to their moral feelings of what is truly right that jury members are asked look before delivering a verdict. It's perhaps not too much of a stretch, then, to ar-

gue that it's morally right to make criminals suffer as their victims have suffered, if that's the way one's moral certainty points.

No matter what one's moral feelings are about inflicting deliberate harm on a human being, the majority of the citizenry still holds that it's right to exact retribution on criminal offenders. This is almost certainly true of the majority of victims, and their loved ones, for whom equanimity becomes more and more difficult depending on the severity of the crime. What rape victim does not wish to see her attacker suffer? What parent does not hate the one who killed their child? The outrage that would result from leaving these passions for revenge unsatisfied might be seen as a dramatic failure of the entire criminal justice system. It's a good argument for retributive justice, then, that in this world public vengeance is necessary in order to avoid the chaos ensuing from individuals taking revenge into their own hands. And, until the moral certainty of a majority of society points towards compassion rather than revenge, this is the form the criminal law must take.

Adapted from: The Lectric Law Library. (n.d.). *Retribution.* Retrieved from: http://www.lectlaw.com/mjl/cl062.htm

Journal entry #10

Write a paragraph or two responding to the following.

Briefly describe one or two topics on which you may want to base your persuasive essay.

Why is this a good topic? What types of challenges do you think you may face in developing ideas on this topic?

Remember as mentioned in the Assessment Descriptions in your syllabus:

You will be expected to respond to the questions by reflecting on and discussing your experiences with the week's material.

When writing your journals, you should focus on freewriting—writing without (overly) considering formal writing structures—but remember that it will be read by the instructor, who needs to be able to understand your ideas.

Your instructor will be able to see if you have completed this entry by the end of the week but not read all of the journals until week 11.