

Writing Persuasive Essays

The goal of writing a persuasive essay is to *persuade* or convince the reader to believe something.

Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph is the first paragraph in the persuasive essay. The introductory paragraphs should have three parts: an attention-catcher (AC), a thesis statement (TS), and a preview of the three arguments. The introductory paragraph is perhaps the most important paragraph in the essay, because it is the first chance to make an impact on the reader. It should clearly express the subject of the essay as well as the writer's position.

Attention Catchers

The attention catcher or lead should be the first sentence in the persuasive essay. It is the writer's first chance to make an impression on the reader, so it should not be spent thoughtlessly. A good attention catcher is angled in a way that immediately pushes the reader toward the writer's position.

Example of a Weak Attention Catcher:

Do you think students should have to wear uniforms?

Notice that this question is open-ended and does not provide an opinion. This should not be the case. The writer's position should be clear before they even mention it based on the strength of their attention catcher.

Example of a Strong Attention Catcher:

Do you think students should be forced to wear long trousers when it is over 100 degrees?

This example is much stronger, because the writer's position is clear from the first line.

Persuasion is about forcing others to think along your lines. Practice this in your writing by using attention catchers that are angled toward your position. It may take more time to write your attention catcher than any other sentence in your essay, but this is time well spent.

Attention Catching Techniques

Here is a short list of attention catching techniques for persuasive essays. This list is not to be thought of as exhaustive, but rather as a few guiding examples to help you get started. I encourage you to combine and experiment with these techniques as your writing develops.

- **Asking a Question:** This has a strong rhetorical effect on readers: people are conditioned to think about questions because answers are often expected of them. When you ask a question in your paper, readers are more likely to consider your ideas. As with any attention catcher, you'll want to take your time writing a good one that begins persuading your audience immediately.
- **Quotation:** A wise person once said, "No matter what you're trying to say, someone else has probably said it better." While you won't have access to the necessary resources to dig up quotes, using an appropriate quote you already know is a classy way to start off your essay. Just be sure that the quote is connected to your topic in some easily identifiable way.

- **Anecdote:** An anecdote is a short story. Beginning your essay with an anecdote that is clearly related to your topic is another way to get the reader's attention and briefly demonstrate your descriptive writing ability. There are a couple of things to keep in mind, however, when using an anecdote to catch the reader's attention:
 1. **Stay on Point:** as with everything in your paper, your attention catcher, especially if it is an anecdote, should be related to your topic and position.
 2. **Stay on Mode:** Remember that you are writing a persuasive essay, not a narrative. Your anecdote should be limited to a few sentences, lest your writing may be perceived as *off mode*.
- **Startling Fact or Statistic:** Did you know that two out of three persuasive essays do not begin with a proper attention catcher? Using a startling fact or statistic is another great way to pique the reader's interest, assuming that you can locate just such a fact.
- **Imaginative Scenario:** Picture this! You have forty-five minutes to write an essay and you need an attention catcher fast. What do you do? One way to do this is to create an imaginative scenario such as the one just described. Immerse your reader in an example of the problem and show them why they should care. Use descriptive writing and sensory details to either positively or negatively charge your writing; however, as with telling anecdotes, be careful not to stray off mode. Remember that your main purpose is to write arguments, not to tell stories.
- **Combinations:** You might find yourself using some hybrid of two or more of these techniques, which is completely acceptable. You can begin with an imaginative scenario and end with a question. Try something wild. When it comes to writing, the most restrictive limitations are the bounds of your own imagination. I encourage you to stretch those bindings whenever you have the opportunity.

Thesis Statement

What Is a Thesis Statement?

a thesis statement:

1. Presents your opinions or thoughts on a subject or an issue. You cannot write an essay without one.
2. Must contain a subject + an opinion.
3. Answers the topic question (the one you created or the one presented to you by the instructor).

TIP: A thesis statement should never contain the following: *in my opinion, I think, I believe*, etc.

Writing a Good Thesis Statement

1. A good thesis statement is short and simple: it should be no longer than one sentence, regardless of essay length.
 - Good Example: *Success is a result of doing the right things consistently.*
 - Bad Example: *In a world full of success gurus and books about success, it becomes ever so more important to delineate the one trait that ultimately determines success: doing the right things consistently.*
2. A good thesis statement is limited to one main idea.
 - Good example: *The key to successful dieting is focusing on a specific goal.*
 - Bad example: *The key to successful dieting is focusing on a specific goal, which is also the key to successfully running a business and coaching a football team.*

3. A good thesis statement is a declarative sentence with no qualifiers (*might, maybe, perhaps, etc.*):
- Good example: *Lebron James' ability to score, pass, and rebound make him the league's most valuable player.*
 - Bad example: *Does Lebron James' ability to score, pass, and rebound make him the league's most valuable player?*
 - Bad Example: *Lebron James' ability to score, pass, and rebound just might make him the league's most valuable player.*

Preview of Main Points

The preview briefly states the main points that will be argued in the essay. The preview is not where the arguments are developed. The preview merely summarizes each point in as few words as possible. Each body paragraph should have one main point. All of the main points should be concisely stated in the preview. An appropriately structured five-paragraph essay will preview three main points. It is important for writers to preview their main points in the exact order that they will be developed. For example, if you claim that your essay will argue *square, circle, and triangle*, your first body paragraph should be about squares, the second should be about circles, and the third should be about triangles. You should write your previews right after the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph.

Body Paragraphs

The term *body* refers to all paragraphs after the introduction and before the conclusion. The metaphor that comes to mind most often in describing this structure is the sandwich: the introductory and concluding paragraphs represent slices of bread while the body paragraphs are the meat and cheese of the essay, so to speak. There are three body paragraphs in a five-paragraph persuasive essay. Each body paragraph should focus on one argument, called the main point.

Main Points

A main point is the purpose of the body paragraph. Each body paragraph should have one clearly stated main point that is expressed in the topic (first) sentence of the paragraph. The main point should then be developed and supported with emotional or logical arguments. A five-paragraph persuasive essay should have three main points and each main point should support the thesis of the essay.

Topic Sentences

Topic sentences clearly state the purpose of the paragraph. Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence. A topic sentence may or may not restate your thesis or position, but should always state the paragraph's central argument. The goals of a persuasive essay are somewhat opposite to that of a mystery novel: when writing a persuasive essay, do not attempt to build suspense by keeping secrets from the reader. Write topic sentences that are clear, direct, and upfront about your purpose.

Example

Students should not have to wear school uniforms, because they limit students' ability to express their individuality.

Notice that this example has two parts: the first part restates the thesis of the essay and the second part is the main point. The rest of the paragraph should argue the main point.

Supporting Details

Supporting details are arguments, examples, or descriptions that justify, explain, and develop main points. My students perennially struggle with properly supporting their main points. In order to help them, I teach them to use *thought stems* to extend and develop their arguments. These thought stems are something like training wheels for writing: once students learn to write they won't need to them; but when they are first learning, students can learn to better sequence and develop their support by using thought stems.

Persuasive Essay Thought Stems

- Another way to say this is...
- This connects to my argument because...
- The reason for this is that...
- To put it another way...
- This shows that...
- This is important because...
- For example...

Making the Connection

Making the connection is when the last sentence in a body paragraph connects the support back to the main point. A good example of why it is important to connect the supporting evidence back to the main point is that of the prosecutor in a criminal case: the attorney doesn't just say, "There were some blood drops in the defendants car," and then end his argument. Having evidence is not enough. The prosecutor must explain what the evidence shows. Likewise, writers need to explain what their evidence shows to make the connection. Don't make the readers draw their own conclusions; that's your job.

Example

*We should not have to wear school uniforms because they limit our ability to express our individuality. What I mean by this is that students have the right to express who they are and how they are feeling. One of the most important ways they do this is through dress. This is how we show the world who we are, particularly in an environment where we are forced to be quiet for 90% of the day. Our fashion makes a unique statement. **If students are forced to wear uniforms, their ability to express themselves will be severely limited. Schools should promote student expression not restrict it. Because of this we should not have to wear uniforms.***

This paragraph begins well by clearly stating the position on the topic and the main point of the paragraph. The paragraph is well developed with logical arguments, and then it closes strongly. But imagine if it ended without the parts in bold? Bringing the argument back to the topic sentence is an essential and often overlooked step. By connecting the support to the main point, writers help readers make the connection. This is entirely essential to writing excellent paragraphs.

Concluding Paragraph

The conclusion is the last paragraph in the persuasive essay. A good conclusion will not only restate the main points of the argument, it will also end with strength and resolution. One way to write a strong concluding paragraph is to restate the thesis and main points of the essay, but then attempt to leave a strong impression on the reader by ending on a clinching statement.

Restatement of Points

A restatement of points is when the writer briefly reviews the main points of their argument. It is very similar to the preview in the introduction but, while maintaining the sequence of the arguments, the writer should not repeat it word for word.

Clinching Statements

The clinching statement is the last idea in the persuasive essay. Since it is your final opportunity to leave an impression on the reader, you should attempt to close with finesse. Here is a list of a few techniques that may help you end your persuasive essays more effectively.

- **The Better World:** The writer attempts to describe an idyllic scenario that will occur if their proposal is accepted. The sun will shine brighter and the sky will be bluer if the writer's resolution is adopted, so to speak. **Example:** *If students are not forced to wear uniforms, our school will have a much more pleasant and productive environment in which everyone will learn and grow.*
- **The Worst Case Scenario:** The writer again attempts to describe a scenario, this time imagining how bad the world might become if their proposal is rejected. Fear is a highly motivating emotion, so the writer should strive to make their scenario as frightful as possible without sounding ridiculous. **Example:** *If students are required to wear uniforms, the environment of our school will become drab and colourless, and the structure of our hallowed institution will be further from a college and closer to a prison.*
- **The Call to Action:** Another good way to end your essay is to ask or demand that your reader take *some* action in support of your proposal. Perhaps you ask them to write a letter or email to their congressman or relevant authority. Perhaps you ask them to recycle their rubbish instead. The scope of your call is dependent on the topic.
Example: *If you understand how important it is for students to have the right to dress themselves, it is your civic duty to attend your local school council meeting and demand that this proposal be rejected.*

No matter which approach you choose, remember the importance of your parting words to the reader and dedicate an appropriate amount of time to closing your essay with finesse.

PRACTICE EXAM

Schrijf een essay over een van de volgende onderwerpen.
Enkele instructies:

- opmaak~ alinea~regelafstand~1.5
- lettertype Arial 12
- 550- 700 woorden
- bedenk zelf een passende titel
- onderstreep je titel
- in de koptekst schrijf je je naam, klas, docent en het aantal woorden
- Je mag gebruik maken van een woordenboek en de spellingchecker in Word
- Print je essay en lees het na op fouten. Verbeter deze op het papier.
- Je mag absoluut geen gebruik maken van andere hulpbronnen.

1. Child labour

Most of the consumer products found in shops today have been produced in low-wage countries. We all know that the working conditions in those countries can be dreadful. Unfortunately, it is difficult for consumers to determine where and under what circumstances products being sold here have been produced. Although the EU cannot change the laws and regulations of other countries, it could stop the import of products produced under dubious circumstances.

Do you think the EU should prohibit the import of all products from these countries? Do you think there might be another solution to this problem?

2. Educational leadership

Cals College is focussing on 'educational leadership', also known as 'ownership', where students are made responsible for their own learning process. Students would then select their own study material, make their own planners and design their own learning goals. Is 'educational leadership' the future?

3. Hazing

Hazing is a common initiation practice for many student associations. The professed goal is for the students to bond during this period after having gone through the same experience. The hazing rituals are often embarrassing and degrading for the students, and can sometimes even lead to physical injuries.

Do you think these practices could or should be stopped?

4. Abortion

Recently, many people have hit the streets in Poland to protest the government's plans to place total ban on abortion. In Poland women can only get an abortion in case the mother's life is in danger, if the child is severely handicapped or if the pregnancy is the result of incest or rape, but according to the government this does not go far enough. In the Netherlands, abortion is legal in any case, as long as it is performed within the first 24 weeks of the pregnancy. Do you think the Dutch regulations are too lenient? Or do you think Poland's regulations are too strict?

Linking words and phrases

Sequence	Result	Emphasis
First / firstly, second / secondly, third / thirdly etc Next, last, finally In addition, moreover Further / furthermore Another Also In conclusion To summarise	So As a result As a consequence (of) Therefore Thus Consequently Hence Due to	Undoubtedly Indeed Obviously Generally Admittedly In fact Particularly / in particular Especially Clearly Importantly
Addition	Reason	Example
And In addition / additionally / an additional Furthermore Also Too As well as	For Because Since As Because of	For example For instance That is (ie) Such as Including Namely
Contrast	Comparison	
However Nevertheless Nonetheless Still Although / even though Though But Yet Despite / in spite of In contrast (to) / in comparison While Whereas On the other hand On the contrary	Similarly Likewise Also Like Just as Just like Similar to Same as Compare compare(d) to / with Not only...but also	