

# WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

**Persuasive writing** can take various forms—letters, proposals, position papers, advertisements, propaganda, reviews, letters to the editor, evaluative essays, and more, so persuasive writing is common in both professional communications and academic research writing. When your purpose for writing is to change a practice, solve a problem, sell an idea, assert a position, impress upon a prospective employer that you are the right person for the job, or simply convince another to accept your point of view as the most valid one, you are writing persuasively. In this resource, the emphasis will be on writing a persuasive essay; however, the strategies may be applied to other forms of persuasion.

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## THE ART OF PERSUASION

The art of persuasion is known as Rhetoric. In classical rhetoric, persuasion involves appealing to readers using ethos, pathos, and logos.

**Ethos** refers to establishing yourself as a credible source of information. To convince an audience of anything, they must first trust you are being earnest and ethical. One strategy to do this is to write a balanced discussion with relevant and reliable research that supports your claims. Reliable research would include quoting or paraphrasing experts, first-hand witnesses, or authorities. Properly citing your sources, so your readers can also retrieve them, is another factor in establishing a reliable ethos. When writing for academic purposes, expressing your argument using unbiased language and a neutral tone will also indicate you are arguing fairly and with consideration of others having differing views.

**Pathos:** When you appeal to your readers' emotions, you are using pathos. This appeal is common in advertising that convinces consumers they lack something and buying a certain product or service will fulfill that lack. Emotional appeals are more subtle in academic writing; they serve to engage a reader in the argument and inspire a change of heart or motivate readers toward a course of action. The examples you use, how you define terms, any comparisons you draw, as well as the language choices you use can draw readers in and impact their willingness to go along with your ideas.

Consider that one purpose of persuasion is to appeal to those who do not already agree with you, so it will be important to show that you understand other points of view. You will also want to avoid derogatory or insulting descriptions or remarks about the opposition. You wouldn't want to offend the very readers you want to persuade.



**Logos:** Establishing an appeal of logos is to write a sound argument, one that readers can follow and understand. To do this, the facts and evidence you use should be relevant, representative, and reliable, and the writing as a whole should be well organized, developed, and edited.

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## CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND WRITING

Writing a persuasive essay involves convincing readers to accept a certain perspective. There are several steps to this process that will guide your approach to research and writing. Before arguing directly for your position, for example, you will need to inform the reader of the issue, and after you assert your position on it, you'll need evidence to help you argue directly for the position, but in order to lessen your readers' resistance, you'll also need to address and counterargue opposing viewpoints.

Therefore, as you research, you'll want to find information that helps you define the issue and support your claim, and you will additionally want to research the objections to your position. If you are proposing a solution, for example, why hasn't it already been implemented?

Once you know the opposing viewpoints, you can anticipate these objections and address them as you present your argument. In doing this, you may be able to refute some by finding holes in the evidence or reasoning behind the opposing viewpoint. You might also want to concede to some objections if they do make sense to you. Acknowledging the gray areas or common ground in an argument can help readers be more accepting of your points of view. You cannot always change someone's mind, but if you can reach a point of agreement or consensus, then you have argued effectively.

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## SAMPLE PERSUASIVE DRAFT, REVISION, AND FINAL ESSAY

In this example of the writing a persuasive essay, we will look at a paper written by sample student Maggie Durham who decided to pursue the same topic as her informative essay (you can read about her process of writing that essay in the section on [Writing an Informative Essay](#)) "parental conduct at children's sporting events." She began by rereading her essay and research and selecting points to pursue for her persuasive essay.

### Prewriting and Research

Maggie began her writing process by listing the points from her informative essay and her previous research.

#### Maggie's list:

- Parental role modeling – sportsmanship
- Parents taking a look at themselves and their bad behavior
- Coaches and their part



- How do the referees fit in?
- What are athletic associations doing about penalties for parents and selecting coaches?
- What is being done about violent parental and coach conduct?
- Sports aren't fun for children any longer

After completing this list, Maggie decided she would do some further research, and so she returned to the Purdue Global Library and did some additional searches in the electronic article databases.

### **Prewriting Part 2: Outline and Thesis Statement**

Using her initial list and additional research, Maggie sorted out the additional information, took notes to turn into an outline, and developed several possible thesis statements. A persuasive thesis statement is a "claim," an assertion, forceful statement, or demand that something is effective or ineffective or that something must be done such as a policy must be changed, a plan should be implemented, or perhaps people just need to change their minds about something.

Ultimately, she decided to focus on the causes of parental misconduct, the purpose of youth sports, and what *should be done* to improve parental conduct in youth sports. When this was completed, Maggie began the rough draft of her persuasive paper.

### **Draft**

Click here to see the first draft of Maggie's persuasive essay: [Sample Persuasive Draft](#).

### **Feedback and Revision**

Maggie received feedback on this draft from her professor and classmates. They pointed out areas where her argument needed to be strengthened, and some areas where a different organization might make her argument more convincing. They also pointed out that she was often not as specific as she needed to be, and pointed out sentences that needed revision.

When revising a draft, we do not just rely on our professor's and classmates' comments. We are often our own best critiques, and so Maggie also took a critical look at her paper. One technique she found helpful was to read her paper aloud because it let her know where her wording was not as clear as it needed to be and helped her catch other typos.

To see Maggie's progress in revising her draft, click here: [Sample Persuasive Draft Revisions](#). Marked-up papers like this should not be submitted, but you may find it helpful, as Maggie has done, to track the changes that you make as you go. Maggie's insertions are in red and her deletions are struck through. Microsoft Word will let you do this: Just click "Tools," then "Track Changes."

### **Editing**

After Maggie has finished making her revisions, she edited her paper for final essay for submission. To see Maggie's final persuasive essay, click here [Sample Persuasive Essay](#).

While you may agree or disagree with the point Maggie makes, pay close attention to how she



lays out her argument. Notice the level of outside support she brings in to support her position. Notice too that her paper is not just a series of quotations: Every piece of outside evidence she includes is accompanied by her own analysis and argument.

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