

Handouts

Teaching Expository and Persuasive Texts Gateway Resource TEPT0004

Persuasive Essay Elements

English Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Glossary Definition

Persuasive essay: text written with the intent to persuade or convince the reader of something

Elements

A persuasive essay is a multiparagraph essay designed to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. The number of paragraphs is not predetermined. The essay includes a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The purpose of a persuasive essay is to persuade readers to adopt the writer's point of view on an issue and/or agree with a suggested course of action. To accomplish this purpose, writers need to develop a logical and reasonable argument that supports their opinions.

Writers establish a position and include detailed and relevant evidence logically organized to support their viewpoint. They differentiate between fact and opinion, consider and respond to other views, and anticipate and answer concerns and counterarguments. A well-written persuasive essay is based on sound reasoning, detailed and relevant evidence, and a thorough consideration of alternatives.

1. Clear, concise, and defined thesis

In the first paragraph of a persuasive essay, writers should present the thesis. In a persuasive essay, the thesis statement presents the writer's position on a topic.

The thesis statement should clearly and directly state a supportable position—one that people could have differing opinions on—related to the topic. The thesis can include a recommendation for action.

The thesis needs to be narrow in focus. To present an effective argument, the thesis must be supported by evidence. If the thesis is too broad, the writer will typically need more evidence to convince readers of his or her position.

Writers need to think about how they want to approach a topic—what type of position or claim they will take in their essay. This is one way to narrow the focus of a thesis. Writers need to consider their position and knowledge on the topic, their audience, and the context of the essay.

Even if writers begin with one type of claim, they can also use several other types to develop their argument within a persuasive essay.

Persuasive essays can include the following types of claims:

- Fact or definition: things that have already happened, are happening now, or will happen in the future and reasons for such occurrences
- Cause and effect: one person, thing, or event causing another thing or event to occur
- Value: morality of an issue, what something is worth, or a call for a judgment to be made
- Solution or policy: an advocating for or against a plan of action to be taken

2. Strong introduction

Persuasive essays should include an introduction that captures the audience's attention and presents the debatable topic. The introduction clearly establishes the writer's position on the topic in a thesis statement.

The importance of the topic is clearly conveyed to the audience. Background information related to the topic may be presented. A strong introduction entices the audience to read on and consider the writer's opinion.

Writers may begin their persuasive essays with a startling fact or a probing question. Effective introductions often include sincere and straightforward language, rather than strong or emotional words that may offend some readers.

3. Well-developed argument with strong evidential support

After writers define their position in a thesis statement, they are ready to develop the argument that will defend their thesis.

First, writers should consider their audience. Questions to consider include the following:

- What does the audience already know about the topic?
- What is the audience's point of view about this topic? Do they already agree or disagree with my position?
- What are the chances of changing the opinions and actions of the audience?
- Are there any sensitive issues I should be aware of?

Next, writers develop their argument by using specific reasons and evidence to convince their audience. Writers must create a logical argument by fitting the facts together, so that they lead to a reasonable conclusion.

The reasons and evidence the writer uses to support his or her position should be specific and well chosen. The writer may choose to recognize the complexities of the issue, use his or her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, and/or connect ideas in interesting ways.

Each paragraph should present one of the strong reasons that support the writer's position and logically connect the reason to the thesis statement (presented in the opening paragraph).

In addition to supporting the writer's own opinion, the persuasive essay should also consider and explain differing points of view (counterarguments) regarding the topic. Writers should point out why opposing opinions do not align with their positions and, if possible, expose faulty reasoning. The writer is trying to prove, through the use of factual information, why his or her opinion is better.

Because the reasons must be supported with evidence, it is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis. Writers should make sure that each supporting reason or fact can be verified either through their own experience or from a reliable source. Writers may include evidence that is factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal.

Examples of different types of evidence include the following:

- Facts that can be proven
- Expert opinions or quotations
- Definitions that state the meaning of a word or phrase
- Statistics that offer scientific support
- Examples that provide powerful illustrations to support facts
- Anecdotes or incidents—often based on the writer’s personal experiences
- Emotional appeals that are carefully chosen to provide support for reasons (can have positive or negative connotations to sway the audience’s emotions)
- Counterarguments that give reasons and evidence to disprove opposing positions
- Calls to action that urge the audience to do something

4. Clearly organized structure

The organizing structure of the essay should clearly present the writer’s position and ensure that all ideas (pro and con) are strongly related to the position and the topic. By sustaining this focus throughout the persuasive essay, the writer is able to create an argument that is unified and coherent.

The writer’s progression of ideas should be logical and well controlled. The most common type of organization used in persuasive essays is order of importance. Writers begin with the least important point or reason and build up to the most important point or reason that supports their position. As a result, the audience is more likely to remember the most convincing and important point that the writer has made in the essay.

Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of a persuasive essay by clearly showing the audience the relationships among ideas, making the writer’s argument easy to follow. Transitions that are often used in persuasive writing include *although*, *admittedly*, *however*, *still*, *on the other hand*, *instead*, *while it is true that*, *nevertheless*, and *nonetheless*.

5. Strong conclusion

A strong conclusion does not simply restate the thesis, but rather readdresses it in light of the evidence provided. The conclusion should be logically drawn from the arguments. Writers should not introduce new information in the conclusion. Instead, they should synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay—restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and/or review the thesis. If writers want to persuade their audience to take some action, they can also make a recommendation in the final paragraphs.

6. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer’s word choice in a persuasive essay should be reasonable and forceful, but also objective. Writers should avoid the use of words that show bias or highly charged emotions. Effective word choice reflects a keen awareness of the persuasive purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the purpose and audience. Writers often focus on refining their word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can refine and improve writing include replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones and inserting phrases and sensory details that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections.

7. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Expository essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns, including simple, compound, and complex
- Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
- Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
- Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction
- Starting sentences in different ways—for example, with an adverb; with a prepositional, participial, or infinitive phrase; or with an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences

Persuasive Essay Elements Mini-Chart

- Clear, concise, and defined thesis
- Clearly organized structure
- Strong introduction
- Well-developed argument with strong evidential support
- Strong conclusion
- Purposeful and precise word choice
- Varied sentence structure

Analyzing Persuasive Writing Tool

Note: *The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the writing is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.*

TITLE: _____

Persuasive Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's position on the topic?	
Does this thesis state a supportable position (or opinion) that is open for debate (with both pros and cons)?	
What type of position or claim (fact or definition, cause and effect, value, or solution) does the author make?	
Strong introduction	
How does the author capture the reader's attention (e.g., solve a problem; start with an anecdote, quotation, question, or interesting fact; point out an irony or paradox; jump into content)?	
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Well-developed argument with strong evidential support	
How many reasons does the author give to develop the argument? What types of supporting evidence does the author use?	
Does the author explain differing points of view (counterarguments) to convince readers why his or her position is better?	

Persuasive Elements	Analysis and Responses
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each limited to the explanation of a single reason that supports the argument?	
Is the author's argument effective (convincing)? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Strong conclusion	
What type of conclusion does the author use (summary, link to beginning, larger context, or call to action)?	
Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Clearly organized structure	
Is the writing well organized? If so, what makes it easy to follow? If not, what would improve it?	
Do the transitions effectively connect ideas and sections of the writing? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	
Purposeful and precise word choice	
Are the author's tone and word choice effective and appropriate for the audience? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	

Persuasive Elements	Analysis and Responses
Varied sentence structure	
What types of sentences does the author use?	
Are the author's sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	
Author's style or craft	
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next piece of persuasive writing?	

Differences Between Expository and Persuasive Essays

An Expository Essay		A Persuasive Essay
The purpose is to present facts and information in an explanatory way.	Purpose	The purpose is to present one side or point of view to convince the reader to accept that viewpoint or to take a particular action.
A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement or central/controlling idea that clearly focuses on the topic or prompt is evident in the introduction of the essay.	Thesis	The position statement on a topic or issue is evident in the introduction of the essay.
Language and word choice are formal and academic.	Tone	Language and word choice may be casual and personal (but no slang).
Writers can use either first, second, or third person, as long as they clearly explain what they think about something.	Point of View	Writers can use either first or third person, as long as they establish and sustain a persuasive tone.
<p>All ideas center on the thesis statement and help to explain the topic.</p> <p>Specific supporting details (factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal) fully explain and clearly describe the topic.</p>	Development of Ideas	<p>All ideas center on a clear position that represents the writer's viewpoint on the issue and forms the basis of the argument.</p> <p>Specific examples (but no false evidence) support the position and make it convincing and powerful.</p>
<p>Ideas related to the thesis are presented in a logical way that best explains the topic and shows relationships among ideas.</p> <p>There are a variety of ways to organize ideas (e.g., anecdotes, examples, compare and contrast, cause and effect).</p>	Structure and Organization	<p>Ideas are presented in a way that maximizes their persuasiveness.</p> <p>Example structure: A writer builds an argument so that the strongest reason or evidence is at the end of the essay.</p>

Writing Persuasively: Purpose + Audience = Word Choice

Note: Both your audience and the purpose of your writing determine the words, language, and level of detail you should use to communicate your position or opinion effectively and to persuade your readers to consider your point of view.

PURPOSE: Think about what you know about a topic or issue to help you decide on a position. For some assignments, research the topic to fully understand all perspectives.

Ask yourself: What is my purpose?

- To inform my readers of things they may not know about this topic or issue
- To convince my readers of my point of view
- To bring about change in my readers' thinking
- To challenge my readers' thinking about the issue

AUDIENCE: Think about the readers you will try to persuade.

Ask yourself: Who is my audience?

- Novices in the field Experts in the field Friends Family
- Teachers Students Others: _____

My audience's level of background knowledge and detail about the topic or issue is:

I think their beliefs and values toward the topic are:

WORD CHOICE: Think about both purpose and audience to determine the word choice for your writing.

Ask yourself: What will be the tone of my writing (my attitude or feelings toward the topic)?

- Casual Formal Positive Negative Sincere Assertive Objective
- Optimistic Reassuring Sympathetic Enthusiastic Respectful
- Other: _____

Ask yourself: What type of word choice (language, vocabulary, and sentence structure) will most effectively convey this tone and my position or opinion to my audience?

My Audience	Word Choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Unfamiliar to me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use formal word choice.• Provide background information if readers are unfamiliar with the topic.
<input type="checkbox"/> Familiar to me	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use casual word choice.• Provide less background information if readers are familiar with the topic.
<input type="checkbox"/> Mature, adult, or advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use sophisticated vocabulary and terminology.• Use complex details.
<input type="checkbox"/> Younger or less experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use simple vocabulary.• Provide explanations and definitions.

Source: Pasquarelli, S. L. (Ed.). (2006). *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Noting Reasons and Researching Evidential Support

Step 1: Complete the Reasons and Evidential Support Chart

1. Record the topic or issue you will address.
2. State your position or opinion.
3. Brainstorm and list three or more reasons that support your position, opinion, or claim.
4. List possible evidence you already know that might support each reason.
5. Conduct research to verify possible evidence and find additional evidential support. Include at least three different types of evidence to support each reason. Evidence may include facts; expert opinions or quotations; definitions; statistics that offer scientific support; examples that illustrate facts; anecdotes or incidents, including the writer's personal experiences; emotional appeals to sway the audience's emotions; or calls to action that urge the audience to do something.
6. In the "Yes, but . . ." section, provide at least one counterargument, or reason someone might disagree with your position, and tell why your position is better.
7. If you cannot find sufficient evidence for a reason, search for a more compelling reason in your source material.

Step 2: Organize the Information in the Reasons and Evidential Support Chart

8. Reread all of your reasons, evidential support, and counterpoints.
9. Sort the reasons based on their importance. Which will be most convincing? Do not forget to include your "Yes, but . . ." counterpoints. Number the reasons in the order that will be most convincing. Begin with the least important and build to the most important.
10. Think about how to present the evidence to support each reason. Number the evidence in the order that you will present it.
11. Share with a partner how you organized your ideas and why.

Reasons and Evidential Support Chart

Persuasive Topic or Issue:		
My Position:		
Reasons	Possible Evidence (What I Already Know)	Evidence From My Research
Yes, but . . .		
Reasons someone might disagree with my position:	Evidence why my position is better:	

Sources:

Pasquarelli, S. L. (Ed.). (2006). *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Portland Public Schools. (Spring 2010). *Grade 5 expository writing: Persuasive*. Retrieved from http://www.ridge.k12.wa.us/cms/lib01/WA01000666/Centricity/Domain/294/G5_Persuasive_Spring_2010-1.pdf

Sample Lesson: Teaching Counterpoints in Persuasive Writing

Objective

Students will learn how to think about and use counterpoints effectively in persuasive writing after watching the teacher model the process.

Materials

- Reasons and Evidential Support Chart displayed at front of room (see last page of this handout)
- Student copies of Noting Reasons and Researching Evidential Support handout

Opening

Teacher: We have learned that the purpose of persuasive writing is to convince or persuade the reader to agree with your position or opinion. We have noted many strong reasons and supporting evidence on the Reasons and Evidential Support Chart for our position on bike lanes.

Let's look at the bottom section of the chart, called "Yes, but . . ." Take a few minutes to look over this section. We will complete the section together today.

Teacher pauses for a few minutes for students to review the handout.

Instruction

Teacher: Who can tell me how the "Yes, but . . ." section of the chart could help us improve our persuasive writing?

Student: This section of the chart is where you imagine what your reader might be thinking about your topic. It is important to stop to think about the audience of your essay.

Teacher: Yes, good explanation! What preconceived ideas or beliefs do you think readers might have about your topic? Will they agree with you? Well, maybe, but probably not 100%.

Remember, because your purpose for writing is to persuade, you can assume that some of your readers probably do not yet agree with you. Some readers likely have a very different opinion, perspective, or experience from yours.

I will show you how to think about your readers and the differing viewpoints they may have about your topic. Remember, I have chosen to write about the need for more bike paths and lanes in our city.

I wonder whether all my readers would agree with me that we need more bike paths and lanes in the city. Some of my readers might think: "So what? I don't ride a bike. None of my friends ride bikes. What do I care?" Others might think that bike lanes and paths are too expensive to build. I bet some readers even believe that there are already plenty of bike lanes and paths in our city. Why build more? I have thought of a lot of reasons why readers might disagree with me. How can I convince them to agree with my position and see the need for more bike lanes and paths?

One way I can persuade them is to point out one or two opposing or differing points of view and then provide a counterargument. That means I will identify a different viewpoint and explain why it is faulty.

To persuade those who think bike lanes are too expensive, I will write a counterargument. I will argue that the cost of bike lanes and paths is worth the money and that they are not too expensive.

I will write these arguments on my Reasons and Evidential Support Chart. In the first column of the “Yes, but . . .” section, I will list a reason that someone might disagree with my position. I will write: “Bike lanes and paths are expensive.”

Write on the displayed chart.

Because I want to support my position and persuade the reader, I will include evidence why my position is better. I will use the “yes, but . . .” pattern to develop ideas for my counterargument. I do not want to be disrespectful. I want to strongly persuade, not shame, mock, or bully my readers. Let me show you what I mean.

In the right column of the “Yes, but . . .” section, I will list evidence why my position is better: “**Yes**, bike lanes and paths cost money, **but** bikes cause less wear and tear on the roads, so less is spent on road repairs.”

Write on the displayed chart.

“**Yes**, bike lanes and paths cost money, **but** bike paths increase tourism and tourism money could help pay for the paths.”

Write on the displayed chart.

“**Yes**, bike lanes and paths cost money, **but** biker safety has no price tag—it outweighs the cost.”

Write on the displayed chart.

So the counterpoints are that bikes cause less wear and tear, so they are a better expenditure in the long run; that the city will have more money from an increase in tourists; and that the safety of residents is more important than any perceived cost.

I want to include some of this counterpoint in my persuasive essay. I will take a few minutes to write about the first counterpoint that I listed. I may or may not keep this information in the final version.

First, I will write a sentence from my chart and combine some of the ideas. This will be the topic sentence of my paragraph:

“**Yes**, bike lanes and paths are expensive to build, **but** over time, they are actually cheaper for the city.”

Write the topic sentence on the board.

Now I will write some more sentences to support my main idea:

“Bikes do not wear out roads as quickly as cars do. The heavier cars are hard on the asphalt, which needs expensive repairs. When you look at the long-term costs of roads for cars compared to lanes for bikes, bike lanes cost less money.”

Write the remainder of the paragraph on the board.

What do you notice about the first sentence?

Student: The first sentence uses the same “Yes, but . . .” pattern from the chart:
“**Yes**, bike lanes are expensive to build, **but** over time, are actually cheaper for the city.”

Teacher: What are some other ways I could have composed my counterpoint?

Student: “Although bike lanes are expensive to build, they are cheaper over time.”

Teacher: Yes, I like how you phrased that one. Who has another suggestion?

Student: “Some people believe that bike lanes are expensive, but so are roads.”

Teacher: What do you notice about the construction of these sentences?

Student: The sentences use a comma between the opponent’s side and the writer’s side.

Clear Task Assignment

Teacher: Think of some ideas your readers might have that go against your position. Counter by providing evidence why your position is better. List these ideas in the “Yes, but . . .” section of your Reasons and Evidential Support Chart.

Use the ideas from your chart, my example, and the sample sentence patterns to write a counterargument paragraph for your persuasive essay. Notice that I wrote four sentences in my paragraph. Try to write at least three or four sentences in yours. Include a comma in your counterpoint sentence like our examples. Make sure you give evidence to support why your position is better. Do not make your opponents’ point for them. Instead, use this paragraph as another chance to prove to readers why your position is better.

Write the steps of the assignment steps on the board.

Reasons and Evidential Support Chart

Persuasive Topic or Issue: Bike lanes and paths in our city		
My Position: Our city needs more bike lanes and paths.		
Reasons	Possible Evidence (What I Already Know)	Evidence From My Research
More lanes and paths reserved for cyclists along existing streets and roads would allow more people to bike.	Lots of people, like me, like to ride bikes. Riding bikes is not always safe on roads, sidewalks, or walkways. Parents often do not allow children to ride on public streets or in crowds.	People often do not bike because they feel it is too dangerous. The No. 1 thing that makes people feel safer is more bike lanes. Adding bike lanes results in more people riding bikes to work and to school. Increased bike riding cuts gas consumption, improves air quality, and reduces dependence on imported oil.
More bike lanes would reduce accidents between bikes and cars.	When bikes and cars are too close together, accidents happen.	Bike lanes reduce accidents. Bike lanes reduce bike riding on sidewalks, which is dangerous to both pedestrians and cyclists (cars more likely to hit them).
Bike lanes would encourage people to visit more parts of the city.	Some of the great places to visit in the city can be reached only on foot or by bike.	Bike lanes heighten awareness of cyclists. Bike lanes preserve open space. Bike lanes provide opportunities for affordable exercise and recreation.
Bike lanes would bring tourists to our city.	More bike lanes and paths is one more reason to visit our city.	Bike lanes can boost the economy—major improvements in bike infrastructure create jobs.
Yes, but . . .		
Reasons someone might disagree with my position:		Evidence why my position is better:

Sources:

Pasquarelli, S. L. (Ed.). (2006). *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Portland Public Schools. (Spring 2010). *Grade 5 expository writing: Persuasive*. Retrieved from http://www.ridge.k12.wa.us/cms/lib01/WA01000666/Centricity/Domain/294/G5_Persuasive_Spring_2010-1.pdf