

NONFICTION

READING AND WRITING FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE



A Guide for Readers and Writers, Part II

The Reading/Writing Connection -- Persuasive Writing

From a reader's perspective

- ◆ Understanding writer's purpose
- ◆ Constructing meaning through
 - ◆ Predicting
 - ◆ Questioning
 - ◆ Clarifying
 - ◆ Summarizing

From a writer's perspective

- ◆ Writing from the perspective of an informed writer to a less informed reader
- ◆ Presenting new information or a new perspective on old information (e.g., facts, examples, reasons, anecdotes, comparisons)
- ◆ Making it clear what the reader should know, do, and/or believe as a result of reading the piece
- ◆ Supporting ideas with facts and opinions demonstrating knowledge of the difference
- ◆ Using appropriate persuasive techniques
- ◆ Using subheads, pictures, captions, charts and graphs, headings, etc. as appropriate

Facts and Opinions

- ◆ **Facts** are statements that can be proven. Facts can be based on a person's own knowledge, experience, and observation. They can also be based on dependable sources and acknowledged experts.
- ◆ **Opinions** reflect a person's attitude, belief, or viewpoint. Words such as I think, I believe, good, bad, best, worst, and should indicate opinions. Opinions are often based on facts.

Refuting an Argument (Counterarguments)

Stepping into the shoes of someone who disagrees with the writer's opinion helps to define what ideas should be refuted in a persuasive piece. If a writer can refute readers' objections with strong arguments (sometimes called counterarguments), the writer is more likely to be convincing.

Faulty Persuasion (to be avoided)

- ◆ **The Bandwagon:** appeals to our sense of wanting to belong and be accepted. It invites you to join the crowd. "Everybody is voting for me. You should, too!"
- ◆ **Either-Or Thinking:** gives two options: either you do this or you do that. It gives you only two opposite ways of looking at a problem. "There are only two kinds of shoes - Brand X and all the rest. So buy Brand X."
- ◆ **Slanted Language:** presents only one side of an issue. The writer attempts to influence you by expressing strongly positive or negative feelings and viewpoints. "Nobody else in my entire class has to be home by nine o'clock."
- ◆ **Appeal to Emotion:** appeals to your feelings. The writer makes you feel bad or good, but does not have logical reasoning behind the assertion. "If you buy this product, you'll look like a million dollars and you'll be really popular!"

Read the following editorial about "*Physical Education*" for an example of problem/solution nonfiction/writing to persuade.

"Physical Education"

The amount of time devoted to physical education should be expanded in all public schools. Currently, we have only forty-five minutes a day for nine weeks of gym class at my middle school. This is typical of all other middle schools in F_____ County, too. This time should be raised to one whole hour and/or for another nine weeks of school. This way, we would have it for at least half of our school year.

One reason I think gym class should be expanded is that it is good exercise for students. Many middle-school students just sit at home and watch television or play video games and hardly ever get any exercise. PE class is very helpful to them as well as to kids who already get some exercise.

A lot of kids do not play sports or even know about some sports. Gym class introduces them to sports and the kids might decide they enjoy playing and want to join an organized team. When kids are on organized teams, they don't have time to hang out on the streets. They do not want to use drugs either because it affects their ability to play.

Playing sports and taking physical education classes teaches children self-discipline. They learn to follow the rules and how to get along with other children. Sports stress the fact that breaking rules, or laws for that matter, is bad. Because of this, we will not have as much crime or violence. In effect, taking physical education classes will improve our society.

Children learn to stay healthy by taking gym. They learn how to exercise properly and how good it makes you feel and look. The kids will want to exercise more and our society will consist of stronger, healthier people.

Playing sports makes kids feel good about themselves. It raises their self-esteem and teaches them that they have to work in order to reach their goals. Physical Education class is the only time some kids get to play sports or exercise. For this reason the amount of time devoted to gym class should most definantly be extended.

(excerpt from 7th grade student writing portfolio)

"Physical Education" - an editorial

Purpose: To persuade
Audience: School policy makers
Text Structure/Idea Development: Problem and Solution

Problem(s)	Solution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gym class is restricted to forty-five minutes a day for nine weeks at author's middle school▪ Many middle-school students just sit at home and watch television or play video games and hardly ever get any exercise.▪ A lot of kids do not play sports or even know about some sports.▪ Crime and violence in society▪ Unhealthy people▪ Lack of self esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gym time should be raised to one whole hour and/or for another nine weeks of school.▪ Gym class is good exercise for students.▪ Gym class introduces them to sports and the kids might decide they enjoy playing and want to join an organized team.▪ Sports stress the fact that breaking rules, or laws is bad.▪ Our society will consist of stronger, healthier people.▪ Playing sports makes kids feel good about themselves.

How Old Do You Have To Be To See Blood?

There has been much debate over the subject of V.G.V. (video game violence), yet none ever taken seriously. Blood, gore, and violent fighting are found in almost every popular game. But that doesn't mean it's right!

Parents should be more aware of what they buy their kids, and stores that carry games could help too. A violent game wouldn't "hurt" a kid, but could alter a child's thinking on how to solve everyday personal problems and make him/her lean more toward violence as a solution.

Example:

Wrestling moves are extremely popular, and known by kids around the world. Some know them and even practice them. So picture it! A kid is being made fun of; everyone is laughing at him. He doesn't know what to do. Another kid steps up, and calls him a name. He's so mad. All he can think of is getting that kid back. So what does he do? He tries what Nash did to Hogan on the game he played the night before, Clothesline!!!

Or, two kids are roughhousing around, and one makes a clumsy attempt of the limb-breaking move off of "mortal Kombat". A careless move like this could be fatal.

All I'm saying is more concern should be concentrated on the welfare of video game playing for children. According to Scope magazine, about 70% of video game fans and players are under the age of 18. This is the usual age limit of the most violent games, yet kids much younger play the same gory games. I have a few suggestions on what could be done.

First- The age recommendation on labels should be enlarged. Something as important as this should *not* be barely noticeable.

Second- Stores should start a policy which would keep kids under the age limit from buying a game that has an overage rating.

Third- Parents should keep up-to-date with the games that are being sold on the market. Their child or children could be playing something totally out of character from what they want them playing.

In conclusion, this could be stopped if parents, game industries, and stores that carry games would wise up! Remember this for the future; the next time you go to buy a game, please, read the label. You never know what you are going to get!

Kentucky Marker Papers, grade 8,
editorial

"How Old Do You Have To Be To See Blood?" - an editorial

Purpose: To persuade
Audience: Parents, game producers, stores that sell games
Text Structure/Idea Development: Problem and Solution

Problem(s)	Solution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Blood, gore, and violent fighting are found in almost every popular game▪ A violent game could alter a child's thinking on how to solve everyday personal problems and make him/her lean more toward violence as a solution▪ About 70% of video game fans and players are under the age of 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The age recommendation should be enlarged to be more noticeable▪ Stores should have a policy to keep under age children from buying inappropriate games▪ Parents should keep up-to-date with games being sold on the market.

The **Persuasive Essay**

THE DEFENSIBLE THESIS

Consider This ...

One key to a good **persuasive essay** is a workable thesis. The best position statements express opinions on subjects that the essayist knows and cares about. Your **persuasive essay** will be better if you remember a few things about formulating the thesis:

A persuasive thesis should not state a fact or a commonly held opinion:

- Canada is cold in winter.
- Vacations are fun.

A **persuasive** thesis should state a personal opinion that can be defended:

- Canada's cold winters build character.
- Vacations increase work productivity. Test the opposite point of view. If it can be argued, then your thesis is a keeper:
- Canada's winters wear down morale. (Yes, you could make a case for this.)
- Vacations decrease productivity. (Yes, this can be argued too.)

Warm-up

Try your hand at turning these statements of fact and commonly held opinions into interesting and workable thesis statements. Read each of the following sentences and on another sheet of paper write another sentence that states an opinion about that subject which would make a good **persuasive essay** thesis.

- The recording business is a multimillion dollar industry.
- Regular exercise is healthy.
- Teen celebrities lead interesting lives.
- Computers have changed the work force.
- Smoking is bad for you.

Ready to Write: Taking the Stand

Now it's your turn to write a **persuasive essay**. Choose a thesis from the five you wrote in the warm-up. Or write a different thesis statement. Brainstorm at least three pros and three cons about your thesis.

Supporting Arguments

Challenging Arguments

Pros

Cons

Now you're ready to write your own **persuasive essay** on a separate sheet of paper. Don't forget your Grammar Goal -- commas in a series!
How will your **essay** be evaluated? These rubrics, or grading points, show what your

teacher will be looking for on the warm-up activity and writing prompt from page 6. Keep these questions in mind as you go.

1. Warm-up rubrics

Questions to ask about a thesis statement:

- Is it a complete sentence?
- Does it express a debatable opinion -- not a fact or "goes-without-saying" opinion?
- Can the opposite be argued?
- Can the thesis be argued rationally, not just emotionally or as a matter of faith?
- Is it substantial enough for a complete *essay*?
- **2. Ready to write rubrics Questions to ask about the *essay*:**
- Does it have an appropriate title?
- Does it have a short introduction that attracts the reader?
- Does the thesis statement appear early and fit the criteria above?
- Does the writer provide at least three convincing supporting arguments?
- Are they well-developed?
- Are they effectively arranged?
- Is the opposing point of view acknowledged and dismissed?
- Does the *essay* conclude with a restatement of the thesis?
- Has the writer used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling, paying special attention to the use of commas in a series?

Write On

Here are 10 more cool ideas for ***persuasive essays***. Keep writing! Convince me that:

1. "If I could have only one book on a desert island, the best book would be ...?"
2. College sports should/should not be professionalized.
3. Movies depict teenagers realistically/unrealistically.
4. Part-time jobs make students more serious about education.
5. First impressions are usually right/wrong.
6. Recordings should/should not carry warning labels.
7. Most Americans don't know how lucky they are to have ...
8. Shopping is a healthy/unhealthy past-time.
9. Animals are smarter than they look.
10. Science fiction is an escapist/realistic genre.

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Section: The *Persuasive Essay* – An Example

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY!

The *persuasive essay* is an argument in writing. Much as a lawyer pleads a case in court, the *persuasive* essayist defends a thesis -- or position statement. A *persuasive essay* should contain the following:

- a clear and arguable thesis
- at least three facts/examples supporting the thesis
- a reference to the opposing point of view
- a conclusion that restates the thesis

The writer collects evidence to support her position. The evidence can be based on personal experience, reading, interviews, or objective research. The writer's final job is to organize and present the evidence so it will convince the jury of readers. Like a good lawyer, a good *persuasive* essayist relies on reasoning, logic, wit, and passion to win the day.

Read the model *persuasive essay* below and see if the writer convinces you. Then complete the writing activity on thesis building. Finally, try your hand at writing a *persuasive essay* that lands a unanimous verdict!

[What Teens Need Most](#)

The average teen needs many things: loving parents, a good school, supportive friends, a nutritious diet, and plenty of exercise. (Cool clothes and a hefty allowance help too.) But ask a teen what she needs most, and she's likely to say, sleep!

The average American teenager is sleep deprived. If my zombie-like friends and I are typical, and I think we are, we average somewhere between five and six hours of sleep on a week-night and only slightly more on busy weekends. While everyone knows that an adult needs eight hours of sleep a night to function well, the still-growing teen needs more. I've heard that only babies between the ages of 1 and 3 need more sleep than teenagers, whose bodies are also sprinting along the growth curve.

Why then do many middle and high schools ring the first bell at 7 a.m., far earlier than elementary schools or colleges? Rising before dawn, high school students sleepwalk through a day that does not end when the sun goes down. Classes may be over at 3, but work continues in the form of after-school activities, sports, lessons, part-time jobs, and homework. For many teens, going to bed at midnight is calling it an early night.

Some adults may think that this exhausting schedule builds character, but have they stopped to think about the side effects of sleep deprivation? Any student who has pulled an all-nighter knows that both reasoning and problem-solving abilities decrease with lack of sleep. Test scores and grades probably slope down the same curve as hours of sleep per night. But it doesn't take charts and graphs to show that sleep deprivation also affects mood. Just ask our parents who drag their grumpy, exhausted kids out of bed every morning. Of all the side effects of sleep deprivation, however, none are more serious than impaired judgment and delayed

reaction time. Cross-country truckers are told by their bosses to get a minimum of eight hours of sleep per night. Should teens get behind the wheel of the family car with any less?

Delaying first period until nine o'clock, coming up with a more flexible homework schedule, and offering a nap alternative to study hall might be ways to begin to address the problem of sleep deprivation in teens. But whatever the answer, the problem is clear; kids are being deprived of a basic necessity. If the future is to dawn bright and rosy for everyone, its leaders must be clearheaded and even-tempered. Set the snooze alarm for later, and let the young people of America get what they need most, a good night's sleep.

Grammar Goal

Items in a series should be separated by commas. Reread the model **essay**. Find all the places where the author has applied this rule. Be sure to use commas to separate items in a series when you write your own **essay**.

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Introduction to a *Persuasive Essay*

Literary Cavalcade SHOWS YOU HOW TO PACK A PUNCH IN YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH AND PRIME YOUR READER FOR PERSUASION

If you've ever been to the theater to see a movie or a play, then you know how important the first scene is. If it doesn't grab your attention and make you excited for what's going to happen next, then chances are you won't enjoy the rest of the show. The same goes for the opening paragraph in a ***persuasive essay***. This introduction is your only opportunity to make your reader want to sit up and listen to what you have to say, so you have to make it count.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

A ***persuasive essay*** asks you to take a position on a debatable issue and present an argument for your point of view. Before you even start writing a persuasive ***essay***, you have to explore the topic and do research. If you were asked whether you were in favor of a certain bill being passed in Congress, you would need to first find out what the bill was, find out why the bill was proposed and what problem it claimed to solve, research that problem, and then ask yourself if you thought the bill would actually solve it. You might want to look up the opinions of some congressional representatives who opposed or supported the bill in order to have a sense of the arguments on both sides. Take notes on all the facts involved and write down quotes that you'd like to use in your ***essay***. This is your evidence.

> A PARAGRAPH WITH A MISSION

The introduction to your ***persuasive essay*** needs to accomplish three things:

1. Engage the reader
2. Explain the issue at hand
3. Establish your point of view

This is a lot to pack into one short paragraph, which is why some students find introductions tough to write. If you're one of them, these guidelines will help you make the most out of your intro.

> DRAMATIC DEBUT

Imagine that your ***essay*** is a play and the opening paragraph is the first scene. When the curtain rises, the audience expects to see something happen immediately. Don't disappoint them. Make your first two or three sentences crackle with life. Have fun with them. Use a metaphor, a reference to a current event, or some other hook to get your reader's attention. If you are writing about genetic testing, don't begin your ***essay*** with a statement like, "Genetic testing is a very important issue in America today." Duh! That's why you're writing about it. Instead, try to show its importance through a fact that will be interesting to the reader. "In 2002, nearly 100 cancer studies included some form of genetic testing. Of these, 10 generated drugs that show some promise of curing the disease."

> SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISSUE

Now that you've got your reader interested in genetic testing, you need to explain what the issue involves. "While many scientists believe that genetic experiments on human cells hold the key to curing diseases like AIDS and cancer, some believe that

stem cell testing is morally wrong, and bills have been proposed in Congress to halt testing." You might go on to show a little bit more of the arguments on each side so your reader understands the full scope of the issue.

> YOUR LINE

Once you have laid out the issue fully but concisely, assert your own position. Be decisive. Come down on one side of the debate and make your opinion clear to the reader. The sentence in which you declare your point of view is called a thesis. It is usually placed toward the end of the introduction. If your **essay** is going to convince your reader of your opinion, then your thesis has to be clear and you have to have a strong argument to back it up. An example of a clear thesis is: "AIDS and cancer kill millions of people annually, and if genetic testing can help save lives, scientists have a moral obligation to use it." With a clear thesis statement, the rest of your **essay** will fall into place.

> DON'T GIVE AWAY THE ENDING

A lot of students make the mistake of trying to pack their whole paper into the introduction. You don't have to tell the reader everything you are going to say right up front. In fact, you shouldn't, because it ruins the suspense! Your reader will be intrigued by the various angles of the issue that you describe in the opening sentences and will be curious to see how you resolve the issue. Your thesis should be a tantalizing taste of the argument to come. While your thesis should be clear, it need not do more than state your position. A thesis indicates where the **essay** is headed, but it shouldn't give away how you are going to get there. That's the job of the supporting paragraphs. So, save the nuances of your argument and by all means keep your evidence for the paragraphs to follow. Let the introduction whet your reader's appetite for the **persuasive** performance that's about to unfold.

POINTS OF PERSUASION

HERE ARE SOME SAMPLE **PERSUASIVE ESSAY** TOPICS:

- >> Do we need arts programs in public schools?
- >> Who really won the 2000 presidential election?
- >> Are professional athletes overpaid?
- >> Is Holden Caulfield a sympathetic character?
- >> Which flavor is better: chocolate or vanilla?

By Sarah Montante

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Applying the Criteria of Effective Real-World Writing to Nonfiction

Purpose/Audience

- The piece may be written for a highly selective readership
- The piece may be written for a variety of audiences who will read only selected parts of the piece
- The purpose is often imbedded in the context of the writing and is less obvious to an outside reader (often the purpose is imbedded in the heading)
- Reader-appeal in the sense of "entertainment" value may not apply
- The writer may assume the reader brings to the writing an interest in the subject; therefore, the lead may be less engaging than direct
- Introductions may seem abrupt because the writer may be relying on the reader's prior knowledge
- The voice may be more professional/business-like than personal
- More emphasis may be placed on tone than on voice

Idea Development/Support

- Idea development may be a function of how thoroughly the content is discussed, as well as the degree of accuracy and specificity of the writing
- Elaboration of ideas may be contained within visuals and data sets which the reader is expected to read, not just view as decoration
- The piece may contain more facts than examples
- The piece may contain few statements of personal opinion
- The piece may give more detail than interpretation of detail
- The piece may have more information than persuasion
- Importance may be placed on how information was obtained
- Extensive use of documentation in technical writing may be necessary to establish authority
- Supporting details may take the form of graphics, statistics, results of surveys, graphs, illustrations
- Use of irony, humor, surprise, paradox, etc., which are highly valued in literature, may be used sparingly or be absent

Organization

- Emphasis may be placed on techniques of organization and format such as use of white space, fonts, and placement of graphics within the piece
- Transitions may be signaled by subject headings and subtitles
- Some information may appear in lists using bullets or numbers
- The organization of the piece may be dictated by the accepted format of the genre
- Accepted methods of documentation may seem an obstacle to reading
- Paragraphing may be more frequent

Sentences

- Sentences may be shorter because information is presented concisely
- Sentence structure may be less varied and less complex

Language

- Language may be precise; richness is usually not a priority
- Language is technically correct
- Use of passive voice may be appropriate, particularly in scientific writing
- Technical terms may be used, defined as necessary for the targeted audience

Correctness

- Spelling is correct
- Punctuation is correct
- Capitalization is correct
- Ideas and information from outside sources are documented

