

LEVEL 2, WORKSHOP 3: THE PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Supplies: writing notebook, pen, computer, scanner; *Seagull Essays*; persuasive essay rubric; “Model Analysis” worksheet; “Spotlight on Reliable Sources”

Goal: to master the process and concepts of the persuasive essay

Suggested time: Follow the prompts throughout the workshop for pacing. In order to keep your project fresh in your mind, however, I suggest you don't let more than one day go by without working on it (except for the weekend).

Remember: I encourage you to begin your study with a 10-15 minute warm-up in your notebook (freewriting or any number of prompts that you can find on the internet). However, doing warm-ups is a choice that belongs to you in this final unit. I will not be checking them.

Resource credits: University of Louisville, OWL Purdue Writing Lab, TheyDiffer.com

INTRODUCTION

Every time you see or hear an advertisement of any kind, you are the audience for persuasive writing. Even if the ad is a commercial on T.V., it almost certainly originated on a keyboard or piece of paper. The goal of persuasive writing/speaking is, of course, to persuade the audience to adopt a certain way of thinking or to commit to a certain action. It is one of the four basic forms of writing. Its category includes persuasion, argumentation, problem-solution, and several smaller sub-categories (advertisements, editorials, propaganda, critical essays about literature or other art, etc). At some point in your life, you will need to write persuasively, which is why this and the last two workshops of this course will cover three different kinds of papers that belong in this category.

Not only is persuasive writing often required in academic courses, but some careers besides copywriting require it—sales, for example. Learning how to argue a point of view, therefore, is an important skill for every student to acquire. In this workshop you will learn how to write a basic “persuasive” essay, which will relate to any other kinds of persuasive writing that you might need to do later.

Before we go any further, it’s important to note that persuasive and argumentative writing are often considered the same thing. Some teachers will use both terms for the same concept, and some may not differentiate between the two. Still others may call the “persuasive essay” by the term “editorial.” In this course I differentiate between “persuasive” and “argumentative” writing, because they really have their own distinctive qualities. Persuasive essays are the easier of the two, and some of its elements are used in argumentative writing.

STRUCTURING THE PERSUASIVE ESSAY

In units 1-3 you learned what I called the “basic essay.” It tends to be structured in the following way: hook, thesis and maybe a projected plan, several supporting points that explain or illuminate the thesis statement, an echo of the thesis statement, and finally a takeaway or clincher statement.

Calling it a basic essay, however, was inaccurate and used only for instructional purposes. What you actually learned in those units was “expository” writing, another of the four main categories of writing. (The last two are narrative and descriptive writing.) I called it “basic,” because expository writing is the most fundamental form of non-fiction writing. Other types of non-fiction writing are variations on its structure.

A persuasive essay incorporates all the elements of the expository essay, but its general purpose is “to persuade.” This means that the thesis statement will present a strong, debatable opinion, and the body will argue for the opinion by

entreating the audience through personal appeals. In addition, the writer must address the opposing viewpoint to show that he has considered all sides of the issue. This helps increase his credibility with the reader, which is critical for convincing the reader to adopt the new viewpoint.

The traditional way to structure a persuasive essay is by acknowledging opposing viewpoints *after* the writer has argued his opinion. Depending on the essay, however, you might address the opposition right away in order to emphasize your own position by placing it last, or you might weave your refutations into each section of your essay. Whichever you choose, keep in mind that your essay shouldn't spend much time on refuting the opposition, because you want your focus to be on convincing the reader of your position. You just need to spend enough time on it to show that you understand all sides of the issue, and you need to use it to strengthen your own position.

Here's an easy, traditional structure to follow for a persuasive essay, but be open to changing it a little if it would serve your essay better:

- Strong hook to grab attention and provide necessary background information
- Thesis statement/projected plan that states position clearly
- Body—arguments using pathos, logos, ethos, telos, and kairos; refutation of opposing arguments; rhetorical questions as needed to get audience thinking
- Strong conclusion in which arguments are wrapped up and clinched through compelling, powerful “convincing” statements and possibly rhetorical questions

ELEMENTS OF A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

At its heart a persuasive essay is an appeal to the reader to adopt a particular viewpoint. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word “appeal” in the sense I

am using it as “an earnest plea.” To plea effectively for something, you must find ways to turn the reader’s sympathies towards you. In order to do that, you need strategies. Because this workshop cannot possibly plumb the depths of persuasive writing strategies, I will introduce you to only five of the most important ones. These “rhetorical” strategies were taught by the great philosopher Aristotle to teach students how to craft effective speeches nearly 2500 years ago, and they are still used today. They apply to writing, as well as speaking.

1. Telos: You have been studying with me long enough to understand the importance of this strategy, because it is about the writer’s purpose or goals. Without a clear understanding of what you hope to accomplish through your essay and how you hope to affect your audience, you will not be able to craft well-developed arguments or cleverly-worded appeals. Of course, keep in mind that your audience has its own purposes for reading your essay, which may be at odds with your own! Because it’s important to understand and speak directly to your target audience, try to anticipate some of these and cleverly address them in your essay. Don’t lose sight of your own purpose, though.

2. Kairos: For your persuasion to be as effective as possible, it needs to be relevant to your audience. “Kairos” has to do with its timeliness and setting. As you will read in the model essay for this workshop, “Speech in Pennsylvania Hall,” the speaker is not referring to an issue that she cares about but no one else does. The issue she is speaking addressing—slavery in the South—was relevant to her readers, because this form of slavery was part of their time and place in history. Today, this particular issue is no longer relevant to us, so the speaker would be wasting her time. For it to be relevant to us in our setting, she would need to speak about the modern but much less known form of slavery called “human trafficking.” When you write your

persuasive essay, be sure your topic and arguments are timely and relevant to your audience’s setting—and then use that setting to help you strengthen your arguments.

3. Ethos: When you attempt to persuade someone to adopt your point of view on an issue, you do not only need to choose words that address the issue itself; you also need to choose words that address your own trustworthiness. Your audience will not care much about what you have to say if they aren’t convinced that you know what you’re talking about. “Ethos” translates from Greek as “character.” In persuasive writing “ethos” refers to the elements of the essay (or speech) that reflect the writer’s character and credibility. One way you might show this is by referring to your personal experience or expertise with the issue. Another way to show “ethos” is by presenting opposing arguments that prove you have thoroughly examined the issue and are attempting to be honest and open. Adopting a tone that is compatible with your purpose and that avoids condescension is also a way to use “ethos” in persuasive writing.

WORKSHOP CONTINUES AND CONCLUDES WITH RELATED ACTIVITIES AND FINAL PROJECT (BELOW)

SPOTLIGHT ON RELIABLE SOURCES

STOP and open the document, “Spotlight on Reliable Sources.” Read the mini-lesson, and complete the assignment.

MODEL ANALYSIS

In this workshop we will study “Speech in Pennsylvania Hall,” by Angelina Grimké. It is a good example of a persuasive speech/essay that uses all five of the rhetorical elements taught in this workshop.

Read the essay once through, annotating it as you read to note your reactions and questions. Then read it again, this time more deeply to understand the themes and meaning below the surface of Grimké’s words. Add to your annotations.

You will need at least **ten (10)** annotations total on the essay. When you are finished, complete the “Model Essay Study” worksheet. You may do it in your notebook first and then transfer your answers, or you may do it directly on the worksheet”.

STOP and complete the model analysis activity. Share it with me when you are finished. You do not need to wait for me to respond before you begin the next section.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PERSUASIVE ESSAY:

STOP. Before you begin, please open the persuasive essay rubric, and study it to see how I will grade you. Refer to it as you work through the writing process, since it will serve as a helpful guide.

Prompt: For this essay I would like you to choose an issue about which you have a passionate, firm opinion, because that will help strengthen your persuasion. You may choose a topic from your list of 25 topics and select an issue within that topic (for example, under that topic of “health” you might have a passionate opinion about the issue of universal healthcare or vaccinations). If you would like to choose a specific prompt, however, you may choose from the list below. You may also use one of these prompts as inspiration for your own prompt:

- Are part-time jobs for students a good thing, or do they hinder a good education?
- Smoking used to be permitted nearly everywhere, but now it is banned in most places. Considering the rights of both smokers and non-smokers, which is the fairer choice for American society? Should smoking be banned anywhere, everywhere, or only certain places? Note that this issue isn’t about whether smoking should be legal or not but where it should be allowed in public places.

- Universities require that an entering freshman must have taken at least two years of a foreign language in high school in order to be considered for admission. They don't typically specify which language must be taken. What do you think of this requirement? Should they should require a foreign language? If not, should anything replace it in the curriculum? If so, should universities require a specific language—and why?
- Some people believe that single-sex grade schools are a better educational choice than co-educational schools. America has a long history of both. Do you think single-sex schools are a good idea? Why or why not?

MORE PROMPTS FOLLOW

Requirements: Your essay must be a minimum of 500 words and a maximum of 1000. This equals approximately 1 1/2-3 pages typed in 12-point type in Times New Roman. I should be able to spot the following elements in your essay: logos, ethos, pathos, telos, kairos, and the opposing viewpoint. You also need a strong hook, conclusion, and plenty of support for your arguments. This is not a research paper, so you do not need to document any facts you use in MLA style; however, if you assert a fact or offer information for which a reader might demand a source, you should still credit your source informally (i.e., “According to such-and-such...,” or “As so-and-so said in such-and-such article...”).

STOP and email me your chosen prompt for approval.

Step 1: Prewriting

- a. Study the attached rubric to understand how you will be scored.
- b. Determine and write your name, audience, purpose, and intended tone on the rubric in the spaces provided. I expect strong, realistic ones for this essay!
- d. Craft a working thesis statement. You can change this when you write your rough draft, if needed.
- e. Develop an outline. Use the outline that you prefer, but a functional outline might work best for this type of essay.

Step 2: Rough Draft

a. In your writing notebook use your prewriting notes to draft your persuasive essay. Send me your rough draft. Remember to add a strong hook to this essay, because it's essential to grab your readers' attention.

STOP and wait for me to respond.

b. If I respond quickly, put your draft aside for a few hours or a day to let it “cook.” By separating yourself from your work for a few days, you will return to it with a fresh eye when it is time to revise.

Step 3: Revision

a. Reread your rough draft with a colored pen or pencil in hand. As you read, mark anything that needs improvement, focusing most intensively on your structure and content. Make notes in the margins or on separate paper.

b. Now choose whether you will revise your rough draft on the same document or whether you will begin a new document, so that you can refer to the original if needed. I recommend beginning a new document, because there may come a point where you want to erase your new ideas and return to the original ones. If you've already typed over the original ones, you may not be able to recover them. Label the top, right corner of the document with your name, date, and workshop title.

c. Make your revisions.

d. Put your revised draft away for a few hours or a day to let it “cook.”

e. Reread your revision and make any further revisions you think would improve your essay. You may want to have a couple of other people read and provide feedback on your essay, too.

Step 4: Editing

a. Read your essay again, this time for correct grammar, smooth flow, and strong vocabulary. Also take note of any awkward or confusing sentences that need to be reworded.

b. Put your essay aside for a few hours or a day, so that you can proofread with a fresh eye. You may want to have a couple of other people edit and provide feedback on your essay, too.

Step 5: Proofreading

a. Proofread your essay three times, each time a little differently because of the way your brain processes information.

- 1st pass—Print out your essay and get a colored pen or pencil. Proofread your essay using the proofreader’s marks that you learned in lesson 22. Make the corrections on your computer document, and put the essay aside for at least a few hours.
- 2nd pass—Reread your essay, this time on the computer. Fix any mistakes you see. By this time you may notice additional editing mistakes or even ways you can improve the content of your essay. This is okay. Make any changes you feel your essay needs.
- 3rd pass—As soon as you are finished with the second pass, ask someone else to proofread it. Then go on to step 6.

Step 6: Publishing

a. Give your essay a title. Try to make it interesting, so that your readers will be intrigued!

b. Make sure your essay is formatted properly. Refer to your cheat sheet and/or the rubric if you need reminders on how to do this.

c. When you have polished your essay to the best of your ability, share it with me and wait for my response.

END OF SAMPLE