

Here's

How

2-2

Focus Your Learning

- create original text in persuasive form
- develop text interpretation around key ideas
- revise to improve audience appeal

Argument and Persuasion

Writers of argument and persuasion use facts, anecdotes, and descriptions to convince the reader of the truth of a thesis. Any topic for which more than one answer or position is possible is suitable for argument or persuasion. You can find such issues by reading the editorial pages of newspapers, watching television, or listening to the radio.

Argument and persuasion are important components of many forms of communication, such as **opinion pieces, essays, editorials, letters to the editor, advertisements, speeches, and debates.**

For information on debating, see page 172.

Characteristics of Argument/Persuasion

- ✍ Argumentative writing often begins by clearly stating the point of view of the writer. This statement is the thesis of the argument, or leads directly into the thesis, and should be as specific as possible. For example, “Building more bike paths would reduce air pollution in our city” is a stronger thesis statement than “There aren’t enough bike paths.”
- ✍ Argumentative writing can persuade by appealing to the reader’s intellect through reason and logic. Facts and evidence are usually presented to support the argument.
- ✍ Sometimes an issue that affects the writer personally is argued through relevant anecdotes.
- ✍ Persuasion goes one step further than argument by encouraging the reader to alter his or her attitude or behaviour. Persuasive writing often makes an appeal to the reader’s feelings.

Terms and Techniques

Thesis A statement that presents the writer's point of view clearly and concisely. It is usually placed at the beginning of the piece of writing.

Anecdote A personal story that a writer uses to reinforce a point.

Logic Clear reasoning used to create a sound, sensible argument.

Evidence Facts, examples, statistics, and other information used to support an argument.

Faulty Reasoning Flawed thinking that fails to prove the writer's point.

How to Write Argument/Persuasion

- ✍ **Introduce** the thesis statement, clearly stating your assertion or position. You might include a preview of why you hold this belief.
- ✍ Place the topic in some context; provide some **background** to the issue.
- ✍ Provide accurate, relevant, and complete **evidence**. Consider using facts, statistics, reasons, and/or examples to support your position. During predrafting, you may have to do research, conduct interviews, distribute a questionnaire to collect data, and so on.
- ✍ Try to **avoid faulty reasoning** since most readers will be able to tell when the evidence you include does not prove your point. The most common errors are described in the chart on page 95.
- ✍ **Anticipate and disprove any contradictory arguments** that might arise. Tone is important here. Your aim is not to “bash” the opposing position, but rather to help your reader see the fairness, the logic, the reasonableness of your position.
- ✍ **Restate your position** in your conclusion. If your purpose is to persuade, you might include an appeal to your readers' emotions and/or a call for action.

Faulty Reasoning

Thinking Error	Description	Example
Begging the question	The writer assumes a premise to be true rather than proves it to be true.	<i>The increase in youth crime calls for longer jail sentences for youth.</i> The writer assumes that there is an increase in youth crime and that longer jail sentences will solve the problem, but no evidence is given to support either statement.
Overgeneralization	The writer draws a conclusion from too little evidence.	<i>Yesterday, I saw a tasteless soft drink commercial. All soft drink commercials are tasteless and should be taken off the air.</i> The writer gives no evidence to show that all soft drink commercials are like the tasteless one.
Non sequitur (Latin for "it does not follow")	The writer states a conclusion that appears to follow from a preceding statement but really does not.	<i>Mr. Zarowny won't let us wear our caps in class. He hates kids and shouldn't be teaching.</i> Here the writer draws a conclusion in the second sentence for which the first sentence provides no evidence.
Ad hominem argument	The writer focusses on a person rather than on the issue, usually to divert attention away from the true problem.	<i>Ms. Levy shouldn't get the job as principal because her son had a car accident.</i> The car accident of Ms. Levy's son says nothing about her ability to be principal of a school.
Misplaced authority	The writer quotes or refers to individuals who are not authorities on the subject being discussed.	<i>Donovan Bailey recommends this brand of automobile tire.</i> Donovan Bailey is a champion sprinter, not an expert on the engineering of tires.



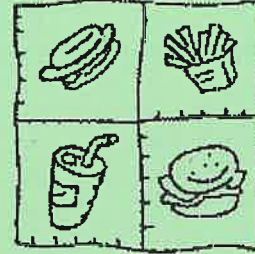
Paragraph illustrating how to write persuasion with supporting facts. Sources for the paragraph follow.

Fast Food? Be Careful What You Eat!

Although many of us find fast food convenient when we are in a rush, it is a bad idea to eat it too much or too often.

Recently, McDonald's in Canada has had the two dollar deal: a Big Mac and small fries.

This is a very big temptation, and even my son (who doesn't normally eat at McDonald's) bought this meal last week. But what did he eat when he ate a Big Mac and fries? First,



in the hamburger he got 570 calories, with almost half of them (280 calories) coming from fat. Ten grams of this fat is saturated, the most dangerous kind, the kind which is harmful to our heart. The Canadian Food Guide recommends that we "choose lower-fat foods more often." Now, remember that my son also gets a small fries! Unfortunately, there are another 210 calories in the fries, with 10 more grams of fat (1.5 grams of it saturated). I'm sure he bought a drink as well, which adds another 150 calories (small size). Now, imagine he eats this dinner more than once a week! A two dollar meal contains a lot of fat. So, although it is very convenient (and cheap) to buy fast food, it is quite alarming to see just how much fat we are eating—I think I'll go and eat an apple, instead!

Sources for the Paragraph

Information on nutritional content of fast food:

Fast Food Facts

Canadian Food Guide (Information on fat in diet)

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal (A book on the fast food industry)

Writing Good Persuasive Paragraphs:

First: Write down at least one idea for BOTH SIDES of your topic. For example, if your idea is, "fast food is bad for us," then be sure to include:

- a) It is a fact that fast food has higher fat than fresher, home made food.
- b) It is ALSO a fact that fast food is convenient when a person is in a hurry.

Second: Make sure you have at least THREE facts to support your opinion. Another fact on fast food is that it is higher in calories due to frying, use of sugar and so on.

Third: Be clear on the ACTION you wish the reader to take. For a paragraph on fast food, we may wish to say, "People would be wise to eat less fast food every week to preserve their health."

Persuasive Paragraph File

Sample Persuasive Paragraph Prewriting

Topic: Homework

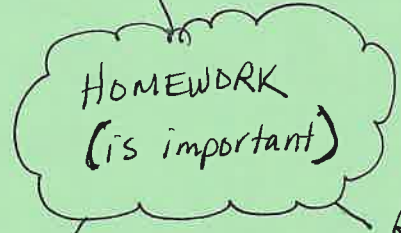
Topic Sentence (opinion): Homework is an important part of the learning process in middle school.

- REASONS:
- (1) additional practice
 - (2) time for longer assignments
 - (3) review

PREWRITING (plan): Reasons with supporting ideas

- (1) ADDITIONAL PRACTICE
- (2) classes too short for adequate practice
- (3) independent practice
- (4) TIME FOR LONGER ASSIGNMENTS
- (5) compositions
- (6) reports and special projects
- (7) students' different working speeds
- (8) REVIEW
- (9) new material and old material
- (10) tests and grades

Additional Practice
— classes too short
— practice alone



projects
compositions
fast vs. slower workers
Time for long assignments

Review
— new + old
— tests

Sample Persuasive Paragraph

Homework is an important part of the learning process in middle school. One reason is that homework gives students additional practice of skills covered in class. Middle school classes are too short to teach a new concept and practice it sufficiently for students to master. Students need both guided practice in class and independent practice at home. Another reason for homework is that it provides time to complete longer assignments. For example, the ideal composition process allows time for students to think and to reflect on their ideas, as well as time to revise and to proofread their writing. Also, reports and special projects often require research that can not always be done at school. In addition, since all students do not work at the same speed, giving students time at home to finish work keeps them from falling behind. Finally, the most important reason for homework is that it ensures review. New material and old material are practiced in daily assignments. Students who do their homework daily are prepared for tests and make better grades. In conclusion, not only is homework essential to mastering new skills and maintaining previously learned skills, but it also guarantees constant review and provides time for longer assignments, as well as additional time for students who need it. Students, do your daily homework, make better grades, and learn more!



TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS (Continued)

AN EXAMPLE OF AN EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH

Remember that an exposition tries to explain things. Sometimes the explanation can be persuasive, as the author has attempted to do in the following paragraph:

Michelangelo

Although Michelangelo is very famous as a painter whose masterpiece is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, perhaps his greatest works are his sculptures. Artists in the time period before Michelangelo's birth in 1475 painted or created statues of religious scenes; but their paintings and statues were more like stick figures than real human beings. Michelangelo's statues show people with muscles and veins, real bodies on real people. Moses, a statue which today is displayed in the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains in Rome, shows a strong man who survived many years living in the desert. Moses is very muscular and looks healthy enough to live through the hardships of his life. Even Mary, one of the two figures in the Pieta found in the Vatican, is a strong and muscular woman as she needed to be to live almost 30 years after the death of her son. But perhaps Michelangelo's greatest work of art is David, a statue which we can see today in the Academia in Florence, Italy. In The Bible, David was a young boy who killed the giant, Goliath, with a stone. A statue of David by Donatello shows a thin, weak little boy with a grin on his face. But Michelangelo's David shows a strong and muscular young man with a look of determination on his face; his David killed a giant with a stone. Because his statues depict the strong human beings that would have existed, Michelangelo shows his genius in his sculptures.

Topic Sentence + argument expressed

Transition words

Notice that this expository paragraph presents an argument about Michelangelo and then explains reasons why the argument is a valid one. The argument is expressed in the first sentence, which is also the topic sentence, and is restated in the concluding sentence.