

Essential Steps for Writing a Persuasive Essay

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Identify your main idea or point of view. Your purpose will be to persuade your audience to accept this idea or point of view.

Identify your audience. To write an effective persuasive essay, try to understand your audience. For example, are your readers undecided about your issue? Or are your readers hostile to your point of view?

I know what you are thinking: but you are our audience McGuire. I know, but I would like you to think about who you would actually be trying to persuade with your essay. And once you have figured this out...

...Consider your audience, and **identify the strongest supporting points** for your persuasion.

Identify the most significant opposing view. Explaining and then refuting the opposing view strengthens the credibility and scope of your essay.

How to organize your persuasive essay:

Introduction- a.k.a. the Pre-Oration

Your introduction should hook your reader's attention and provide background information on your topic or controversy. And when I say hook, I mean hook. If you are going to use rhetoric, now is the time to lay it on. You might ask a rhetorical question, or appeal to emotion, or appeal to authority, or appeal to your audience intellect, or play on your audience's biases; you must be willing to play dirty, if need be. You must think of this opening as a call-to-arms, with a "*Once more, unto the breach!*" level of hyperbole. This intro should not be for the faint of heart. Your audience should be hanging on your every word.

*A small thought at this point of the proceedings: this is a persuasive essay, and not a persuasive **literary** essay. Your position should not be that J.K. Rowling's prose is pedantic and banal; instead it could be that we all should read the entire collection of *Harry Potter* books because the act will make us better people. I hope you can see the difference between those two positions.

The paragraph should end with a clear thesis statement. Remember that you are arguing a position, and not fact. A fact cannot be argued; your thesis statement must be arguable.

Body paragraphs a.k.a. The Argument

Your body paragraphs should present the points in support of your main idea. You must aim for three main supporting ideas; ergo, you should have three body paragraphs.

Each body paragraph should focus on one point, and it should have a kick-ass topic sentence to set it off.

Be sure to provide evidence or examples for each point. This can be facts garnered through research, or real situational examples created by you. You might also appeal to authority in this case (which would need to be researched, vetted, and cited).

Facts vs. Belief- one common mistake made by neophyte writers is to confuse fact with belief. A fact is something that can be proven empirically, and cannot be argued; a belief is something that many people assume to be true, and that has thusly taken on a veneer of fact, but nonetheless remains unproven. Much as that last sentence remains impenetrable.

Opposing view a.k.a. Concession and Refutation

After presenting your supporting points, develop one paragraph to accurately explain and then refute the most significant opposing view. This might be the most important moment in your essay. Nothing strengthens your credibility more than your willingness to accept points against your position, and nothing neuters these points quicker than a quick and brutal counter-point.

Conclusion a.k.a. "You've come this far, don't blow it"

Creatively restate your main idea and supporting points. The key here is "creatively". Now is a good time to spring for another ten bucks worth of rhetoric, if you're able.

And try to leave your audience even more connected to your topic and persuaded by your main idea or perspective.