

What is Persuasion?

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the requirements and conventions of argumentative writing, and how to approach this type of writing. You'll also explore how persuasive writing strengthens your communication skill. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Overview of Argumentative Writing

The primary form of academic writing is driven by **argument**, or a clear position on a debatable question that is supported with evidence and reasoning. In an academic context, an argument doesn't refer to fighting, which sometimes comes to mind when the word is mentioned.

When discussing writing, it's instead useful to think of an argument as a conversation between thoughtful people who, although they have different views, want to answer the same questions.

The components of successful academic arguments include:

- A clear, focused thesis on a debatable question
- Support consisting of reasoning, credible research, and evidence
- A discussion of counterarguments
- Use of rhetorical appeals

Being able to identify the components of an argument is not only a useful skill, it is necessary for anyone who wants to master written communication. Readers who understand what an argument is (including its structure, components, and assumptions), and what particular arguments are trying to convince them to accept, derive the most benefit from what they read.



Communication: Why Employers Care

Arguments, in the academic sense, are bound to come up in any work environment. Employees who can professionally and intelligently convey their point of view and persuade others are a strong asset to an organization. Employees need to persuade their colleagues to make decisions that are best for the company, persuade clients to make a profit, and persuade stakeholders to stay invested in the organization and maintain a positive image.



By identifying the components of argumentative writing, you can analyze its effectiveness. Instead of just being convinced or unconvinced (perhaps without understanding why), you'll be able to evaluate arguments critically. You won't be misled by elegant phrasing or false logic.



Argument

In academic writing, a clear position on a debatable question that is supported with evidence and reasoning.

2. Modes of Persuasive Argument

Although argumentative essays sometimes incorporate other modes of writing (e.g., the persuasive or informative modes), all essays that present an argument are considered argumentative.

The persuasive mode is similar to the argumentative: Both of these writing modes seek to influence readers to accept an assertion or take a particular action. The persuasive mode, however, emphasizes pathos (appeals to readers' emotions) more than ethos (appeals to readers' sense of right and wrong) or logos (appeals to logic and reasoning). Note, however, that persuasive writing can and should make use of all three types of appeals. The goal of persuasive writing is to persuade your **audience**, which includes any intentional or unintentional readers of your text, to take some sort of action; while some forms of argumentative writing share this goal, argumentative writing may also simply aim to demonstrate the validity of a particular viewpoint without convincing the audience to act in a particular way as a result of hearing the argument.

Writing in the informative mode does not argue a specific point, but instead provides information about a subject. This sometimes involves analysis and interpretation, however, which require a form of argumentation. Since the purpose of informative writing is to inform—not to convince or persuade—this mode is a different kind of writing with different requirements.

The following paragraph is an excerpt from an essay. As you read it, look for elements of argumentative, persuasive, and informative writing.

Growing your garden can be a very rewarding experience and a healthy way to get outdoors. From planting, mulching, weeding, and harvesting, each stage of the garden has a new activity and exercise. Not only this, but the rewards of the garden are also much healthier. By the time that store produce arrives at your table, many days or even weeks have passed since it was harvested. However, the nutritional value of food starts to decrease the moment it is picked (Sullivan 2020). Gardening has so many benefits, but many of those in cities do not have this opportunity. This is where a community garden can give everyone a chance to participate in this beneficial hobby that puts nutritious food on the table for families, regardless of where they live.

Multiple modes of writing are used in this excerpt. The writer attempts to inform the reader about the subject, but they also take and support a position. In addition, the persuasive mode is evident at the end of the excerpt, when the writer makes an emotional appeal that expresses their desire for all families to have access to a vegetable garden.



BIG IDEA

The lines between the different modes of writing can be crossed. In fact, those lines are blurred to some extent in most essays. Therefore, most argumentative writing incorporates some elements of the persuasive and informative modes.



TERM TO KNOW

Audience

The intentional or unintentional reader(s) of a text.

3. Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetorical appeals are strategies used in writing that are designed to persuade or convince the reader. There are three types of rhetorical appeals, which you will learn more about in the next lesson.

For now, here is a brief description of each:

- Pathos is used to convince readers by evoking their sympathy or compassion for the claims that are made. Pathos can be used unethically, especially when it is not balanced by evidence and reason.
- Ethos bases appeals on credibility. Although the term used to refer only to the credibility or character of the writer (or speaker), modern ethos-based arguments are likely to rely on the credibility and trustworthiness of the information sources used in an essay.
- Logos bases appeals on logic and reasoning. Logos-based arguments use facts and evidence to support logical claims. This form of appeal is the primary focus of many argumentative essays.

Note that most instances of persuasive writing use all three forms of appeal in one way or another. They are often called the rhetorical triangle because they can all work together to create an effective argument. In Touchstone 1.2, you will analyze how an author uses these appeals to discern if they have created an effective argument. Using these appeals strengthen your **communication skill** by using strategies that resonate with your audience.



WATCH

The ability to persuade is a powerful tool. In the following *Sophia Stories* video, meet the diverse group of people you'll encounter throughout this course – individuals who are using writing to change lives and improve circumstances in their communities and careers. You'll discover that honing your persuasive writing skills can improve your work product and your personal relationships, and empower you to impact the world around you.



TERM TO KNOW

Rhetorical Appeal

A strategy used in writing that is designed to persuade or convince the reader.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you received an **overview of argumentative writing**. Argumentative writing takes a clear position on a debatable question and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning. You then learned that there are different **modes of persuasive argument**. This means that argumentative writing often incorporates elements from the persuasive and informative modes of writing. These modes of writing use **rhetorical appeals**, which are strategies that you can use to try and convince your readers of your position. Finally, you discovered how persuasive writing strengthens your communication skill.

Best of luck in your learning!

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