

Persuasive Essay Elements

ELAR TEKS Glossary Definition

Persuasive essay: text written with the intent to persuade or convince the reader of something

Elements

A persuasive essay is a multiparagraph essay designed to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. The number of paragraphs is not predetermined. The essay includes a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The purpose of a persuasive essay is to persuade readers to adopt the writer's point of view on an issue and/or agree with a suggested course of action. To accomplish this purpose, writers need to develop a logical and reasonable argument that supports their opinions.

Writers establish a position and include detailed and relevant evidence that is logically organized to support their viewpoint. They differentiate between fact and opinion, consider and respond to the views of others, and anticipate and answer reader concerns and counterarguments. A well-written persuasive essay is based on sound reasoning, detailed and relevant evidence, and a thorough consideration of alternatives.

1. Clear, concise, and defined thesis

In the first paragraph of a persuasive essay, writers should present the thesis. In a persuasive essay, the thesis statement presents the writer's position on a topic/issue.

The thesis statement should clearly and directly state a supportable position—one that people could have differing opinions on—related to the topic/issue that is open for debate. The thesis can include a recommendation for action.

The thesis needs to be narrow in focus. To present an effective argument, the thesis must be supported by evidence. If the thesis is too broad, the writer will typically need more evidence to convince readers of his or her position.

Writers need to think about how they want to approach a topic/issue—what type of position or claim they will take in their essay. This is one way to narrow the focus of a thesis from a broader topic/issue. Writers need to consider their position and knowledge on the topic, their audience, and the context of the essay.

Even if writers begin with one type of claim, they can also use several other types to develop their argument within the persuasive essay.

Persuasive essays can include the following types of claims:

- Fact or definition: things that have already happened, are happening now, or will happen in the future and reasons for such occurrences

- Cause and effect: one person, thing, or event causing another thing or event to occur
- Value: morality of an issue or what something is worth, or a call for a judgment to be made (e.g., right/wrong, good/bad)
- Solution or policy: an advocating for or against a plan of action to be taken

2. Strong introduction

Persuasive essays should include an introduction that captures the audience's attention and presents the debatable topic/issue. The introduction clearly establishes the writer's position on the topic/issue in a thesis statement.

The importance of the topic/issue is clearly conveyed to the audience. Background information related to the topic/issue may be presented. A strong introduction entices the audience to read on and consider the writer's opinion.

Writers may begin their persuasive essays with a startling fact or a probing question. Effective introductions often include sincere and straightforward language, rather than strong or emotional words that may offend some readers.

3. Well-developed argument with strong evidential support

After writers define their position in a thesis statement, they are ready to develop the argument that will defend their thesis.

First, writers should consider their audience. Questions to consider include the following:

- What does the audience already know about the topic/issue?
- What is the audience's point of view about this topic/issue? Do they already agree or disagree with my position?
- What are the chances of changing the opinions and actions of the audience?
- Are there any sensitive issues I should be aware of?

Next, writers develop their argument using specific reasons and evidence to help convince their audience. Writers must create a logical argument by fitting the facts together so that they lead to a reasonable conclusion.

The reasons and evidence the writer uses to support his or her position should be specific and well chosen. The writer may choose to recognize the complexities of the issue, use his or her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, and/or connect ideas in interesting ways.

Each paragraph should present one of the strong reasons that support the writer's position and logically connect the reason to the thesis statement (presented in the opening paragraph).

In addition to supporting the writer's own opinion, the persuasive essay should also consider and explain differing points of view (counterarguments) regarding the topic/issue. Writers should point

out why opposing opinions do not align with their positions (thesis) and, if possible, expose faulty reasoning. The writer is trying to prove, through the use of factual information, why his or her opinion is better.

Because the reasons must be supported with evidence, it is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis. Writers should make sure that each supporting reason or fact can be verified either through their own experience or from a reliable source. Writers may include evidence that is factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal.

Examples of different types of evidence include the following:

- Facts that can be proven
- Expert opinions or quotations
- Definitions that state the meaning of a word or phrase
- Statistics that offer scientific support
- Examples that provide powerful illustrations to support facts
- Anecdotes or incidents that are often based on the writer's personal experiences
- Emotional appeals that are carefully chosen to provide support for reasons (can have positive or negative connotations to sway the audience's emotions)
- Counterarguments that give reasons and evidence to disprove the opposing position(s)
- A call to action that urges the audience to do something

4. Clearly organized structure

The organizing structure of the essay should clearly present the writer's position and ensure that all ideas (pro and con) are strongly related to the position and the topic/issue. By sustaining this focus throughout the persuasive essay, the writer is able to create an argument that is unified and coherent.

The writer's progression of ideas should be logical and well controlled. The most common type of organization used in persuasive essays is order of importance. Writers begin with the least important point or reason and build up to the most important point or reason that supports their position. As a result, the audience is more likely to remember the most convincing and important point that the writer has made in the essay.

Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of a persuasive essay by clearly showing the audience the relationships among ideas, making the writer's argument easy to follow. Transitions that are often used in persuasive writing include *although*, *admittedly*, *however*, *still*, *on the other hand*, *instead*, *while it is true that*, *nevertheless*, and *nonetheless*.

5. Strong conclusion

A strong conclusion does not simply restate the thesis, but rather readdresses it in light of the evidence provided. The conclusion should be logically drawn from the arguments. Writers should not introduce any new information into the conclusion. Instead, they should synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay—restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and/or review the thesis. If writers want to persuade their audience to take some action, they can also make a recommendation in the final paragraphs.

6. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer's word choice in a persuasive essay should be reasonable and forceful, but also objective. Writers should avoid the use of words that show bias or highly charged emotions. Effective word choice reflects a keen awareness of the persuasive purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the purpose and audience. Writers often focus on refining their word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can refine and improve writing include the following:

- Replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones
 - Action verbs
 - Adjectives
 - Adverbs
- Inserting phrases and sensory details that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections

7. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Expository essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex
 - Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
 - Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
 - Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction

- Varying sentence beginnings by starting sentences in different ways
 - With an adverb
 - With a phrase (i.e., prepositional, participial, or infinitive)
 - With an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences