

# Writing to Persuade

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## *An Introduction*

The activities that follow are designed to serve as an introduction to persuasive writing. They provide background and allow students to learn about and practice some important principles of persuasive writing before they actually attempt to write a persuasive paper or essay themselves.

This section also includes information about many of the propaganda techniques that are commonly used for persuasive purposes.

# What Is Persuasive Writing?

**P**ersuasion takes many forms. It is everywhere in our daily lives, from commercials to billboards to cartoons to newspaper stories. Often, it is used in writing.

What is persuasive writing, exactly? It is any type of writing that attempts to persuade us to adopt a point of view, agree with an opinion, take an action, form a belief, etc. It is any type of writing that involves an *argument*.

For the next few days, pay attention to the forms of persuasion that surround us. Find three examples of arguments and bring them to class. Choose from the following:

- A letter to the editor
- An editorial
- A cartoon
- An advertisement
- A newspaper article
- A written description of a radio or television commercial
- A written description of an argument you heard in a discussion or a lecture
- Any other example of material that contains an argument

## Follow-up

For each of the three examples you found, answer the following questions:

1. What is the *issue*?
2. What is the *argument* or *point* that the piece is trying to make?
3. Does the piece make effective arguments? Is it convincing?
4. What would you change to make the argument or arguments more effective?

# Point of View

Every piece of writing, including persuasive writing, comes from a specific *point of view* or *perspective*. If you and your brother get into a fight, you are likely to give a very different account of events than he will. You will probably say that he started it. He will say that you did. You will both be telling the story of the fight from a different *point of view*.

Have you ever known a couple who broke up? If you talk to both people from the ended relationship, you will likely get two very different accounts of how and why they broke up. She might tell you they broke up because he was too boring, while he might say they broke up because he was interested in someone else. The two people will be telling the story of the break-up from two different perspectives.

All persuasive writing has a point of view. If it's your paper, it will be from your point of view, of course. If it's by someone else, it is important to look at that point of view. If a piece is telling how a political candidate is a brilliant, highly talented leader, it is important to know that it is being written from the point of view of the campaign manager. If a piece tells how the same candidate is an incompetent nincompoop, it is important to know that it is being written from the point of view of her opponent's campaign manager. Point of view has a definite impact on the contents of any kind of writing.

## Directions

Practice looking at how point of view influences a story. Imagine a fairy tale told from the point of view of each of the characters involved. Cinderella might first tell the story from her point of view, beginning something like this:

*My dad used to have good taste in women. He married my beautiful, kind mother, didn't he? After she died, though, he settled for my stepmom, who is nothing but a mean, hateful old hag.*

The wicked stepmother might then tell the story from her point of view, beginning something like this:

*When I first met my husband, I should have known he was too good to be true. If I had known then that I'd be saddled with this lazy, worthless stepdaughter, I would never have agreed to marry him.*

Now try telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood from the point of view of each of the main characters. (You may need to review the story first. Look it up in the library or on the Internet, if necessary.) Retell the story from the perspective of each of the following characters:

- Little Red Riding Hood
- The grandmother
- The wolf
- The woodcutter

# Fact vs. Opinion

To write a persuasive paper, you must present an opinion. You've got to make a point and try to convince others that your opinion is the correct one.

You can't write a persuasive paper about, say, "penguins." You might write a *report* on penguins, or an informative paper. However, you would not be trying to persuade readers of anything. You would just be *telling* them about penguins.

Papers that just give information are filled with facts. Papers that persuade must be filled with facts *and* opinions.

## What is a fact?

Christopher Columbus told everyone that the world was round, but no one believed him. At the time, everyone thought the world was flat. However, as the story goes, in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue to prove his point. He demonstrated that the earth is round, and since then satellites have sent us actual photos of our round earth, giving us further proof. It is a *fact* that the earth is round.

A fact is a piece of information that can be confirmed or verified. For example, you can confirm that sea water tastes salty. (Simply have someone take a sip of it.) You can confirm that Snoop Dogg starred in *Soul Plane*. (Go to a video store and check out a copy.) You can confirm that the sky looks blue to those on earth. (Just go outside and look up.)

## What is an opinion?

An opinion, on the other hand, is simply a point of view that someone holds. It is a *fact* that some tomatoes are red. It is an *opinion* that tomatoes taste disgusting. It is a *fact* that *The Simpsons* is a television show. It is an *opinion* that it is the funniest cartoon on television.

It is important to know the difference between fact and opinion when writing or researching a persuasive paper. Test your ability to distinguish between fact and opinion. For each question below, mark either F (fact) or O (opinion).

- \_\_\_ 1. Lindsey Lohan starred in *Mean Girls* and *The Parent Trap*.
- \_\_\_ 2. Lindsey Lohan is a gorgeous babe.
- \_\_\_ 3. Born Harold Jenkins, country singer Conway Twitty took his stage name from Conway, Arkansas, and Twitty, Texas.
- \_\_\_ 4. Country music sounds like a group of dying alley cats.
- \_\_\_ 5. Fall is the best season because of milder temperatures and the changing leaves.
- \_\_\_ 6. Monster Truck-A-Thons are tacky.

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- \_\_\_ 7. SPAM online is even more annoying than phone calls from telemarketers.
- \_\_\_ 8. In the cartoon, SpongeBob SquarePants lives in a pineapple under the sea.
- \_\_\_ 9. The *SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* is not as good as SpongeBob's TV show.
- \_\_\_ 10. Jessica Simpson is a better singer than Ashlee Simpson.
- \_\_\_ 11. Ashlee Simpson was caught lip syncing on "Saturday Night Live."
- \_\_\_ 12. Dale Earnhardt earned over \$27 million racing cars in his lifetime.
- \_\_\_ 13. Dale Earnhardt is the best race car driver who ever lived.
- \_\_\_ 14. Teenagers are more responsible than their parents think.
- \_\_\_ 15. The legal voting age should be lowered to age 16.
- \_\_\_ 16. Split pea soup should be banned from all school cafeteria menus.
- \_\_\_ 17. Ansel Adams used black and white film to take photographs.
- \_\_\_ 18. Colorado is the coolest state to live in because of its winter sports.
- \_\_\_ 19. The Statue of Liberty is a popular tourist destination.
- \_\_\_ 20. Tony Hawk is a professional skateboarder.
- \_\_\_ 21. No Doubt is the best-dressed band of the 1990s.
- \_\_\_ 22. A hybrid vehicle runs on a combination of gas and electricity.
- \_\_\_ 23. Leonardo DiCaprio is the best actor ever.
- \_\_\_ 24. Listening to classical music is lame.
- \_\_\_ 25. Gettysburg is the site of the largest battle of the Civil War.
- \_\_\_ 26. XBox games are superior to PlayStation 2 games.

# Propaganda Techniques

**T**hroughout history, propaganda has been used to help influence the way people think. Propaganda involves carefully using words or pictures in a certain way in order to influence opinions, emotions, attitudes and behavior. Propaganda is all around us, in commercials, in ads, in political campaigns, in company annual reports, in press releases, etc. It can be used for both positive and negative purposes.

It is important to be able to recognize common propaganda techniques. When you recognize them, you are better able to resist pressures to think or feel a certain way—except when you agree that thinking or feeling that way is a good idea.

**Bandwagon** involves the argument, “Everyone is doing it, so you should, too.” In other words, you should “jump on the bandwagon” and think/do/act/look a certain way. The technique is very much like peer pressure.

**Testimonial** is used when an important person or famous figure endorses a product or an idea. The underlying message is that if this important person believes something is a good idea, it must be. Commercials often use this technique when they show a famous person using a product.

**Transfer** is the technique of using symbols that pack a strong punch with their message. The symbol might be something people either widely respect or widely despise. For example, the American flag can stir strong emotions. That’s why political candidates try to stand in front of as many flags as possible. They are trying to “transfer” the good feelings people have about the American flag onto themselves.

**Repetition** is based on the idea, “If you repeat something over and over again, people will believe it.” Sometimes political candidates accuse their opponents of having done something undesirable, and they repeat the charges in commercial after commercial. Whether or not the charges are true, people often start believing them, simply because they have heard them so often.

**Plain Folk** is a propaganda technique that uses ordinary people or “plain folk” to gain the confidence and trust of the audience. Plain folk fit most people’s image of decent, everyday people. They speak in simple, straightforward language and use common sense. Plain folk advertising uses words such as “family,” “children,” “home” or “neighbors” to convey a warm, down-to-earth, home-like feeling.

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**Directions:**

Each of the following describes a commercial. What propaganda techniques are used in each?

1. A 35-year-old woman from the Midwest says, "I don't know much about newfangled technology, but I do know I like using World Online Internet service to e-mail my daughter who moved to New York City. It just brings her closer to home."

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2. An ad shows the attacks on the World Trade Center, and then cuts to a red, white and blue background. This text is displayed: "Don't be caught off guard. Buy Commerce State Life Insurance. Don't leave your loved ones unprotected."

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3. An ad shows a basketball player dunking the ball. He says, "Milk is great." A woman is shown running and catching a subway. She says, "Milk is great." A teenage boy is shown on a date with the cutest girl in school. He smiles and says, "Milk is great." A baby is shown happily playing. Her shirt says, "Milk is great." A beautiful model with a healthy glow says, "Milk is great."

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4. An ad shows a group of cute young people walking and dancing in Times Square. They are all wearing the same style of flat-front khakis. Text comes up saying, "Join the Club. Wear Club Khakis."

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5. A man is at home with his kids while his wife is on a trip. The kids have made a big mess in the kitchen. He says, "At times like this, I wish I knew more about keeping the house clean. But, thankfully, there is ForestSheen. It cleans everything...and, I mean *everything*. My family would be lost without it."

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**Follow Up:**

Find one example on television or in print for each of the techniques listed on the previous page. Identify the propaganda technique(s) being used in each example.

# Art and Persuasion

**D**iego Rivera. Michael Moore. Maya Angelou. Bob Marley. Trey Parker. What do these five people have in common? They have used protest art—murals, film, poetry, reggae music and cartoons—as a form of persuasion. “Protest” art refers to art that is used in a persuasive way to protest, challenge, or even make fun of certain ideas.

In 1933, for example, Nelson Rockefeller, one of the richest men of the time, commissioned Mexican artist Diego Rivera to create a mural at Rockefeller Center in New York City. The mural was to depict “Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future.” Rivera protested capitalism by creating a mural with pro-Communist and anti-capitalist images. Rivera said, “I was quite aware that I was going against public opinion.” Rockefeller eventually removed Rivera from the mural project and in 1934 ordered that the mural be destroyed.

Protest art can be a very effective form of persuasion. It uses a paintbrush, poetry, film or other mediums to create images that tweak our emotions. While persuasive writing uses mostly logic and words to persuade, persuasive art relies on the creation of images. Images can be created in many ways. Film, paintings, cartoons, etc., rely on images you can see. Poetry and songs use words to create images that you can *imagine*.

## Directions

Look up the following examples of protest art.

1. Pablo Picasso’s “Guernica”
2. “I, Too, Sing America,” by Langston Hughes
3. “Blowin’ in the Wind,” by Bob Dylan
4. Cartoons from “Dr. Seuss Goes to War”
5. “Still I Rise,” by Maya Angelou

For each piece of art, write a paragraph that answers these questions. Do not read what the “experts” have to say about the art. Explain what *you* see.

- What images are used?
- What message do the images send?
- What were they protesting? Challenging? Making fun of?



# Declaring Yourself

**Y**ou have learned about the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson. However, have you ever really thought about what it *is*? It is exactly what the title says it is—a declaration.

The Declaration of Independence boldly declares that the United States of America has become an independent country. Brand new countries often use a declaration both to chart their paths and to be taken seriously.

A persuasive paper does the same thing. It makes a declaration. (The declaration eventually becomes part of the *thesis statement*, but more on that later.)

Declarations are easy to write. They come from your gut. They are not meant to be elegant. Writing a declaration is simply a way to begin molding your argument.

## Practice

Make a declaration for each of the topics below. Think of gladiators or knights as they engage in battles. Wield your pencil like a sword and make each declaration strong and powerful.

Here are two examples:

**Topic:** *Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches*

**Declaration:** Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are the perfect food.

**Topic:** *Water quality*

**Declaration:** Every American has the right to a clean, uncontaminated glass of water.

1. **Topic:** *The environment*

**Declaration:**

2. **Topic:** *Music sharing on the Internet*

**Declaration:**

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3. Topic: *Going on a diet*  
Declaration:

4. Topic: *Censorship*  
Declaration:

5. Topic: *Country music*  
Declaration:

# Because I Said So . . .

**M**ost young people have had conversations like the following:

BOY: Why do I have to make my bed if I'm just going to sleep in it again?

MOM: Because I said so.

GIRL: Why do I have to come home at 10:00 p.m. when everybody else gets to stay out until midnight?

DAD: Because I said so.

“Because I said so” may be effective for parents. However, nobody, including parents, can use “because I said so” as reasoning in a persuasive paper. A persuasive paper must include the *reasons why* behind an argument. The reasons must be specific.

Here's an example of what *not* to write:

*Everyone should watch “Punk’d” because I think it is so great.*

This sentence, in essence, says, “Watch ‘Punk’d’ because I said so.”

Here is a much better argument:

*Punk’d is one of the best shows on TV because it is funny; it brings famous people back down to earth; and host Ashton Kutcher is adorable.*

Instead of relying on “because I said so,” this argument gives three reasons why. Persuasive papers generally include *at least three reasons* that support the argument.

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## Practice

For each of the arguments that follows, come up with three *reasons why*. (Play along even if you don't agree with the listed argument. Later on, you will have plenty of time to write about your own opinions.)

**Argument:** It's hard being the oldest brother or sister in a family.

1. It is hard because . . .
2. It is hard because . . .
3. It is hard because . . .

**Argument:** The state should lower the driving age to 14.

1. It should lower it because . . .
2. It should lower it because . . .
3. It should lower it because . . .

**Argument:** Being a vegetarian is not a wise choice for teenagers.

1. It is not a wise choice because . . .
2. It is not a wise choice because . . .
3. It is not a wise choice because . . .

**Argument:** P.E. class is an important part of school.

1. It is important because . . .
2. It is important because . . .
3. It is important because . . .

## Follow-up

Come up with three arguments of your own. Then write three *reasons why* for each of the arguments. You might choose from some of these topics:

popular music

war

rules at school

SPAM

political candidates

teenagers and credit cards

the environment

chat rooms

Japanese animation

violent video games

movie ratings

guns at school

joining the military

"Goth" culture

teenage drinking

wearing animal fur

curfews

# Defending the Ridiculous

## Teacher Instructions

**P**ractice in supporting a point does not have to be an oh-so-serious exercise. In fact, some of the best practice can come from doing just the opposite—having students try to support *ridiculous* arguments. They can have some fun, stretch their brains, and gain some valuable practice giving *reasons why*.

Have students work in small groups. Ask each group to choose any three of the following arguments and then list at least three reasons of support for each.

- Chimpanzees should have the right to attend public school.
- All school drinking fountains should be filled with Gatorade.
- It should be illegal to chew your fingernails and toenails.
- Students should always be allowed 10 minutes at the end of every class to socialize.
- Students should be allowed to dress like Christina Aguilera at school.
- It should be illegal to wear pants that are too low-waisted.
- Everyone should be required to have at least one pet.
- The “Barney” song should be our new national anthem.
- Text messaging truly makes the world a better place.
- It should be illegal to use classical music as a ring on your cell phone.
- Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups should be considered one of the basic food groups.
- You should not be allowed to use slang if you are over the age of 35.
- Belly-button piercing should be done when someone is an infant.
- No teenage drivers should be forced to drive any kind of mini-van with wood grain panels on the sides.
- Police should take away the driver’s license of anyone who repeatedly drives way below the speed limit.
- Snoop Dogg should be elected President of the United States.

# Practice Developing a Thesis Statement

## Teacher Instructions

The activity that follows gives students practice in developing thesis statements. It can be handled in several ways. If at all possible, have students work in small groups, so that they can share ideas. Give the groups only *one* of the “Question Lists” that follow. The lists are arranged, very roughly, according to age appropriateness. In other words, the questions in “Question List #1” are generally ones that even younger students might have an opinion on. “Question List #2” includes a mixture of questions for different age levels. “Question List #3,” the last list, includes items that are more appropriate for older students.

Each list includes a large number of questions. Students are to choose only three questions and develop a thesis statement around each.

Although they are to select only three questions, just reading over a list of questions can be very helpful to students. The list can give them ideas for avenues they might pursue when they write persuasive papers of their own.

# Practice Developing a Thesis Statement

Every persuasive paper you write must include a thesis statement. A thesis statement answers the question, “What is your point?” It combines a declaration on your topic with the reasons why you believe the declaration is true. It serves as a road map to your paper, stating briefly—in only one sentence—what your opinion is, and why.

Your thesis statement should be written before you write your actual paper because it will help mold and guide what you write. As you write your paper, you may find you need to tweak your sentence to sound better or to better reflect the facts you discover in your research.

Practice writing thesis statements by following the directions below:

## Directions

Select three of the questions from the “Question List” your teacher will give you. For each question, begin by writing a declaration—a bold opinion on the topic. Next, write at least three reasons why you believe as you do.

Once you have your declaration and your reasons why, mold all of that into one sentence, which will be your thesis statement. This isn’t difficult, but it can take a little time. Here is an example:

**Question:** Should the FBI or police be able to see what books you have checked out from the library?

**Declaration:** It should be illegal for the government to see what books a person checks out from the library.

### Reasons Why:

It is a violation of the First Amendment.

It violates our right to privacy.

It turns librarians into law enforcement officials.

**Thesis statement:** It should be illegal for the government to access someone’s library records because to do so violates the First Amendment, violates our right to privacy and turns librarians into law enforcement officials.

# Question List #1

1. Is it right for the government to require kids to attend school?
2. Should smoking cigarettes be illegal?
3. Would it ever be okay to arrest someone before he or she commits a crime?
4. Is our society too lenient with cheaters?
5. Do you deserve an allowance? Or a raise in your allowance?
6. Is homework necessary in order for students to learn?
7. Should students be able to attend school over the Internet?
8. Who should pay when a guy and a girl go on a date?
9. Are video games too violent?
10. Is it fair for teachers to give you a lower grade if you turn in an assignment late?
11. Should skateboarding be allowed on school grounds, parks, and public sidewalks?
12. Should unchaperoned young people be allowed into R-Rated movies?
13. Should young people be allowed to have a TV in their own room? Their own telephone? Their own computer with Internet access?
14. Do rodeos promote cruelty to animals?
15. Is it fair for schools to require decent grades from students who participate in sports, student council, band, etc.?
16. Should you spay/neuter your pets?
17. Are schools for only one gender a good idea, i.e., schools for boys or schools for girls?
18. Should the legal age for driving be raised?
19. Should public school students be required to wear uniforms?
20. Should the legal age for drinking be lowered?
21. Is it okay for a public library to remove from its shelves books that people find objectionable?
22. Is it a good idea for schools to ban junk food and soft drink vending machines on school property?
23. Should middle school and junior high students be allowed to leave campus during the day?
24. Should parents refuse to let their children hang out with friends they don't like?
25. Should parents limit the time their children spend playing video games?



# Question List #2

1. Are small schools better than large schools?
2. Should the law require people to wear seat belts?
3. Should prayer be allowed in public schools?
4. Is rock music better today than it was in the 1980s? 1970s? 1960s?
5. Should young people be allowed to buy cigarettes?
6. Will a woman ever become president?
7. Does prison reform people?
8. Does some rap music demean women?
9. Is it okay for men and women to use cosmetic surgery to remain youthful looking?
10. Is it okay for young people, like yourself, to have cosmetic surgery?
11. Should newspaper reporters ever have to reveal a confidential source?
12. Should teachers be paid more than professional athletes?
13. Should employers have the right to see your medical records?
14. Should there be a salary cap in professional sports?
15. Is the use of performance enhancing drugs casting a negative shadow on sports ?
16. Is it wrong to eat animal products, such as milk and eggs?
17. Should pharmaceutical companies be allowed to advertise on television?
18. Do Americans spend too much time watching television?
19. Do Americans have a weight problem?
20. Are some people just born "bad"?
21. Can our founding fathers still be considered good men if they owned slaves?
22. Should a mother stay home with her young children, rather than work outside the home?
23. Should the Constitution be changed to allow people born in other countries to run for President of the United States?
24. Should foul language be banned on television?
25. Is "grounding" an effective punishment for young people?

# Question List #3

1. Is the death penalty ethical?
2. Are taxes necessary?
3. Is capitalism the best type of economy?
4. Should a state recognize same-sex marriage?
5. Should the government help fund stem cell research?
6. Should the United States provide financial aid to foreign countries in need?
7. Should pharmaceutical companies provide low-cost or free drugs for AIDS victims in Africa?
8. Should the United States ever forgive foreign debt?
9. Should schools provide day care to assist teenage mothers?
10. Should drug addicts be sent to prison?
11. Should students be required to learn a foreign language?
12. Is it fair for school officials to be allowed to search student lockers and backpacks for drugs or weapons?
13. Is it fair that auto insurance rates are more expensive for males under the age of 21 than for females?
14. Is it ethical to do scientific research on animals?
15. Should schools teach creationism along with the theory of evolution?
16. Should the government fund artists through the National Endowment for the Arts?
17. Should major league baseball test its players for possible drug use?
18. Should people be allowed to gamble online?
19. Should the government tax purchases made over the Internet?
20. Should teenage murderers ever be sentenced to death?
21. Are people born innately good or evil?
22. Should the descendants of slaves be given reparations from the government?
23. Should health insurance pay for alternative health treatments, like massage, acupuncture or homeopathy?
24. Should the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approve drugs for the marketplace more quickly?
25. Should states require citizens to obtain a license before becoming parents?

# The Groundwork

**W**hen writing a persuasive paper, a lot of work needs to be done before you actually begin writing. Before you pick up a pencil or sit at a computer to write, you need to mull over ideas, think them through, and examine them from different angles. Professional writers do their “mulling” in a variety of ways. Some may think things over while they load the dishwasher or take a walk. Others may brainstorm, outline, or “web” their thoughts on paper before they actually start the writing process. J.K. Rowling, for example, filled notebooks full of outlines and ideas before she wrote the first sentence in her Harry Potter series. This process of thinking, mulling, outlining, and jotting things down is called prewriting.

The activities that follow are prewriting activities. They get your mind moving in the right direction and prepare you to write your paper. While all of these prewriting steps may seem time-consuming at first, they will usually *save* you time because they give your writing focus right from the start.

## Prewriting steps for a persuasive paper:

1. Choose a topic.
2. Make a declaration.
3. “Web” or brainstorm for ideas.
4. Make a point.
5. Create a skeleton.

These steps are discussed in detail on the following pages.

## Hot List

Before you ever begin to write a paper, it is smart to have a “Hot List.” A Hot List, created throughout the school year, includes topics that you are interested in or want to learn more about. Keep the list in the back of your writing notebook, English folder or journal. Whenever you think of an interesting topic, add it to your list. When your teacher assigns a paper, it is easy to look over your Hot List for ideas.

# Choosing a Topic

**C**hoosing a topic is one of the most important steps in writing your paper. A topic can make or break your paper. If your topic is too big, it can be difficult to write about it without writing an entire book. If your topic is too narrow, you may be able to write only a single paragraph about it. The most important test, however, is if you are actually interested in your topic. Remember, it is going to take some time to write a persuasive paper. You will be living with your topic for a while, so you had better like it.

1. To choose a topic, begin by writing down some broad topic ideas you are interested in.

**Examples:** cats, SPAM, TV, cell phones

2. Now narrow your topic to something more specific that you might write about.

**Examples:** cat overpopulation, SPAM laws, TV decency standards, cell phones in schools

3. Finally, come up with a declaration about your topic.

**Examples:**

- All cats should be spayed or neutered.
- Laws that prevent SPAM seem like a good idea, but they violate the First Amendment and will be hard to enforce.
- The FCC has gone overboard trying to enforce decency standards and is violating the First Amendment.
- Schools should allow students to have cell phones in school.

4. Finally, give your declaration the “Topic Test,” on the next page.

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## Topic Test

1. Am I interested in this topic?
2. Is this topic based on my opinion? (Remember, a persuasive paper must present an opinion. Otherwise it is just a report.)
3. Do I believe strongly in the opinion I will be writing about? (It can be difficult to write an entire persuasive paper if you feel ho-hum about your argument.)
4. Do I want to learn more about this topic? (You must do research on this topic to provide evidence to support your argument. If you think you already know everything about the topic and don't want to learn more, it will make doing research difficult.)
5. Is this topic too broad? (If there are entire books written on your topic, it is probably too broad. Narrow your topic further. For example, instead of writing about America's entire foreign policy, you might narrow the topic to your opinion of America's recent foreign policy in Somalia.)
6. Is this topic too narrow? (You must make sure that you can write a full paper on this topic. If your teacher has assigned a ten-page paper, and you think you can write only a couple of paragraphs on the topic, your topic is too narrow.)
7. Will you be able to find enough material? (You must be able to find supporting evidence in a variety of places. Be sure you can come up with at least three places, off the top of your head, where you are likely to be able to find information on your topic.)

# Webbing

Think about a spider and her web. Starting in the center, she spins out branches from this main point. Then she continues to spin new lines from these branches.

You can do the same thing when thinking through your argument for a persuasive paper. Start by writing your declaration in the middle of a page. Focus on your declaration and spin off ideas from it. Take these ideas and spin more thoughts off of them. Continue until you have filled the entire page.

Example:



NOTE: Webbing is a way to brainstorm. When webbing, it is important to follow brainstorming rules:

1. Remember that when brainstorming, nothing is a bad idea. Put down everything you think of, without judging it. The more ideas you brainstorm, the easier it will be to write. (You can also choose to ignore any bad ideas later.)
2. Move quickly. You are not creating a work of art. Don't erase. Don't write in your perfect handwriting with little hearts over the i's. Brainstorming is messy work.

# Writing a Thesis Statement

Have you ever had a friend tell you a really long, really boring story? You can't concentrate on what he is saying because all you can think to yourself is, "What is his point? Does he even *have* a point?"

Your long-winded friend could benefit from a thesis statement. A thesis statement is one of the tools you use to keep your persuasive paper on focus. It is *one* sentence that answers the question, "What is your point?" It lets readers know what you are going to talk about in your paper and where you stand on the issue.

When you actually begin researching and writing your paper, you may refine your thesis statement. You are free to tweak the words, or even to change certain points after you have done more in-depth research. However, you should at least have a working thesis statement before you begin writing.

Follow the steps below to create a working thesis statement.

1. Write your declaration here.
2. What are the *reasons why* you believe as you do? Write at least three reasons here, if not more. Look at your webbing page to help you out.
3. Create your thesis statement, molding your declaration and your *reasons why* into one clear statement.

# The Skeleton

**S**keletons are not only a part of haunted houses and anatomy projects. They can also be an important part of writing. Before you begin writing the body of your persuasive paper, you should first build the skeleton.

A skeleton shows the bare bones of your paper. Once you have a skeleton, you can easily add the meat to your paper and flesh out your arguments. (Some skeletons are called “outlines” by English teachers. The kind of skeleton we are talking about here is a very basic one.)

Using a separate sheet of paper, follow the steps below to create a skeleton for your own paper. (Note: It is important to remember that your skeleton may change as you find out more information through your research.)

**Step One.** First, write your thesis statement. It is likely to become the powerful last sentence of your introduction.

**Example:**

*A nutritious snack program would be a great addition to our district because it would allow schools to raise money, keep students from being hungry during the school day, help fight obesity in young people, improve student performance and teach students about nutrition.*

**Step Two.** After your thesis statement, write out each of the *reasons why* that you have included in your thesis statement, leaving room to write after each one. Then add “gut information” to each reason why. Gut information is anything that you know or think you know, without doing research. Write things even if you are not 100% sure about them. You will be doing research, so you can delete anything that is false. Make notes about the items you definitely want to check on.

**Example:**

**A nutritious snack program would still allow schools to raise money.**

For some reason, schools always need to raise money.

Schools have used vending machines in the school to raise money in the past.

Some schools even have contracts with soft drink companies like Coca-Cola. (Research)

**A nutritious snack program would keep students from getting hungry during the school day.**

When students are hungry, they don't do as well in school.

Most students are still growing and generally need to eat during the day. (Research)

Hunger is distracting and can cause headaches and drowsiness.

**A nutritious snack program would fight the growing obesity problem in young people.**

The news keeps reporting that young people are fatter than they used to be. (Research)

We eat more junk food than we used to, which probably makes kids fatter. (Research)

Junk food is readily available at school, but healthy food isn't.

(continued)



**A nutritious snack program would improve student performance.**

Sugary snacks can also hurt student performance.

People eat junk food and get a sugar high but crash after 30 minutes. (Research.)

**A nutritious snack program would teach students about nutrition.**

Schools are supposed to teach kids.

Offering junk food snacks just teaches kids that junk food is okay. (Research.)

Offering nutritious snacks would teach kids how to make nutritious choices.

**Step Three.** For each of the reasons why, write down several questions that you have. Also write down where you might find that information.

**Example:**

**A nutritious snack program would still allow schools to raise money.**

For some reason, schools always need to raise money.

Schools have used vending machines in the school to raise money in the past.

Some schools even have contracts with soft drink companies like Coca-Cola. (Research.)

Questions:

What is my school's policy on junk food vending machines? (Ask Principal DeLuca.)

Why do schools need to raise money? Where does it go? (Ask Principal DeLuca and look online.)

How many vending machines does my school have? (Talk to the janitor.)

How much money do our school vending machines make? (Ask Mrs. Leider in the office.)

What does it mean for a school to have a contract with Coca-Cola? Is it a school contract or a district contract? (Ask Principal DeLuca.)

When you have completed the three steps above, you will have a skeleton for the body of your paper. You also will have outlined the next steps you need to take before you begin writing.

# Think Elbows!

**Y**our elbow does have a purpose beyond jabbing friends when you want them to notice something. It joins the top of your arm with the bottom of your arm, connecting the two parts in a way that allows your arm to work better. Our arms would not function very well without the connection created by elbows.

Sentences and paragraphs need connections, too. When you write, *transition words* help connect different thoughts and make your writing flow more smoothly. *Transition words* bring thoughts, sentences and paragraphs together into one coherent piece. Without them, each thought can seem to flail alone.

Transition words are important in all kinds of writing, but they are especially important in persuasive writing. The point of persuasive writing is to make a good argument, and transition words help you lead readers in the direction you want to take them.

Consider these two examples:

**No transitions.** *Student lockers are school property. They contain a student's personal items. Student lockers should be protected by privacy laws.*

**With transitions.** *Although student lockers are school property, they contain a student's personal items. Therefore, student lockers should be protected by privacy laws.*

The first example is very choppy. The second flows better and is easier to understand.

## Practice

Add transition words from the box below to the choppy sentences on the next page. Use the transition words to help make the sentences flow more smoothly and make better sense.

### Transition Words

and • but • or • while • although • unlike • however • yet  
 unless • therefore • in contrast • similarly • in other words  
 to sum up • because • consequently • first • next • sometimes  
 surely • besides • undoubtedly • in addition • likewise • furthermore  
 for instance • on the other hand

(continued)

1. The room I share with my sister is wallpapered with Nelly posters. I can't stand Nelly. The posters should come down.

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2. Many adults argue that teenagers watch too much television. Most teenagers have responsibilities like work, homework, sports practice, music lessons or play practice. Teenagers don't have time to watch too much television.

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3. I am a hard worker and good student. I am responsible and enthusiastic. I am a not-so-nerdy bookworm. The Thurgood Marshall Public Library should hire me for the summer.

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4. Miami Heat's player Shaquille O'Neal is over 7 feet tall. He is one of the biggest players in the NBA. Shaquille O'Neal is one of the top ranked players in the sport. Shaquille O'Neal can't make his free throws.

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5. I think that eggs, waffles and Pop Tarts are gross. Bacon, cinnamon toast and grapefruit halves are disgusting. I can't find any breakfast food I would want to choke down. I usually prefer to skip breakfast.

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# Connecting Paragraphs

**W**any students think that paragraphs are just five or six sentences grouped together. While paragraphs do contain sentences, they are much more than that. Paragraphs are a group of sentences that all address the same idea. When you change the idea you are writing about, you should start a new paragraph.

The trick, however, is to make all your different paragraphs connect and hang together. That is where transition words come in. Amazingly, these little words and phrases can make the difference between a coherent, organized paper and a confusing, jumbled paper.

## Practice

Take a look at how professional writers use transitions. Comb through magazine and newspaper articles, hunting for transitional words or phrases.

Collect three news articles and circle all of the transition words in each article. To help you remember, refer to the transition words in the box below.

### Transition Words

and • but • or • although • unlike • while • however • yet  
 unless • therefore • in contrast • similarly • in other words  
 to sum up • because • consequently • first • next • sometimes  
 surely • besides • undoubtedly • in addition • likewise • furthermore  
 for instance • on the other hand •

## Follow-up

Read each article to yourself *without* the circled transition words. Read each article with the transition words. In a sentence or two, describe the difference. How do transitions improve writing?

# Synthesizing Information

If you have ever heard a song re-mix, you know what synthesizing is. Synthesizing is taking items from different places and weaving them together in a cohesive way. While it sounds easy enough, synthesizing your own ideas with what you have found in research can be difficult. It involves weaving information from several or many different places into one coherent thought.

## Directions

Practice your synthesizing ability by molding all of the information below into one paragraph. Remember, transitions are key to making your thoughts flow smoothly. Use the common transition words in the box below to help you.

### Transition Words

and • but • or • although • unlike • while • however • yet • unless • therefore  
in contrast • similarly • because • in other words • to sum up • consequently  
first • next • sometimes • surely • besides • undoubtedly • in addition • likewise  
furthermore • for instance • on the other hand

**Main Point:** *More and more children and families are suffering from hunger every year.*

**Evidence:** *Poverty rates are on the rise, according to census information compiled by Second Harvest, a non-profit food bank network.*

*“Between 2000 and 2001, poverty rose to 11.7% of the population, or 32.9 million people, up from 11.3% and 31.6 million,” says America’s Second Harvest.*

*According to their own study, food banks across the country have had an 86% increase in requests for food assistance over the past year.*

*A “food insecure” household is a household that does not always have enough food for an active, healthy life.*

*According to a report by the USDA, 14.8% of American households with children were “food insecure.” That rate rose to 16.1% in 2001.*

# I Feel Wishy-Washy

Imagine that a teacher is giving you advice about persuasive writing. Which of the following versions sounds more convincing?

*When you are writing a persuasive paper, I think that you should not use these phrases: I think, I feel, or I believe. I feel that these phrases make you sound wishy-washy. I believe that your opinion is stronger when you leave them out.*

OR

*When you are writing a persuasive paper, do not use the phrases: I think, I feel, or I believe. These phrases make you sound wishy-washy. Your opinion is stronger when you leave them out.*

The second version, of course, is much stronger.

When they are trying to make a point, many people throw in phrases like *I think, I feel, or I believe*. They sometimes believe that such words make them sound more polite. They actually make them sound less certain. Leaving out such phrases allows an opinion to stand out more clearly.

Think about it. What if Thomas Jefferson had written “I think that all men are created equal”? It just doesn’t pack the same punch as “All men are created equal.”

## Directions

Rewrite the e-mail letter below, taking out all of the wishy-washy phrases like *I think, I feel, or I believe*. (You may have to take out the word *that* sometimes, too.)

Dear goeyslouie@hotmail.com:

Eddie, I think that you are the one for me, and I believe that I am the one for you. I think that you are always looking at me in Mrs. Dietz’s class. I feel we are a match made in heaven. Even though you are always in in-school suspension, I believe that you are a good person deep down inside. My mom and my best friend Shelby don’t agree, but I think that they just don’t know you like I do. I think that we should declare our love to the whole school by going to the Fall Festival together. What do you think?

Love,

diamondprincess4567@yahoo.com (Clarissa)

## Follow-up

Write a strong, opinionated e-mail from Shelby to Clarissa, persuading her to stop chasing Eddie. Remember, do not include phrases like *I think, I believe, or I feel*.

# Kind of . . . Sort of

**W**hen former Austrian weight-lifter Arnold Schwarzenegger ran for governor of California, no one heard him say, “I kind of want to be governor of California. I’m sort of the man for the job.”

Like most successful politicians, Schwarzenegger knew that words like *kind of* and *sort of* sound wimpy and ineffective. He was much more likely to say, “I want to be governor of California. I’m the man for the job.”

Like Schwarzenegger, your persuasive writing should be strong. Just adding the words “kind of” or “sort of” make your argument seem more like Stuart Little than Arnold Schwarzenegger.

## Directions

Your best friend Jody isn’t ready to run for governor, but she is ready to run for president of your school’s student council. On a separate sheet of paper, help her make her speech stronger and more effective by taking out all the “wimpy” words and phrases:

Principal Gomez, teachers, students, and honored guests:

I kind of want to talk to you about my qualifications for student council president. I think that I would be more or less the best person for the job because I sort of love this school. Don’t you kind of agree that a student council president should feel sort of strongly about her school? I also feel that I’m pretty qualified because I’m kind of a good student. I’ve also served on student council for the past two years, so I sort of know how everything works. So, if you love this school, like I sort of do, then I think you should vote for me, if you want. Thank you.

## Follow-up

After hearing Jody’s wishy-washy speech, you decide to run for student council president yourself. Write a speech explaining in strong language why your fellow students should vote for *you*.

# Starting Steps for an Introduction

Two wrestlers enter the arena with music, lights and much fanfare. When they reach the wrestling ring, they remove their silky robes, revealing glitzy outfits. After the official blows the start whistle, the two wrestlers dance around the edge and scowl at each other. Only after all of this do the wrestlers finally pounce on each other, and the match begins.

In some ways, the introduction to a persuasive paper is very similar to a professional wrestling match. A lot goes on before the first “punch.” You must announce yourself and dance a little before you can deliver your message.

The introduction acts as an attention-getting device. It tells readers, “Hey, pay attention to what I have to say!” It also serves as a road map to the rest of your paper because it includes the main “punch”—your thesis statement.

Many writers have a hard time writing introductions. For some help getting started, complete the steps below. You will be gathering information for your introduction with these steps, not writing the actual introduction.

Later you will use the information you have gathered to try two different methods of writing a strong introduction.

## The Glitz

The first part of an introduction is “the glitz.” You should begin in a way that grabs the reader’s attention—perhaps with a powerful quote, a strong statement, or a bold statistic. Follow the steps below to gather information for this part of your introduction.

1. Find a quotation that fits your topic. Look for something by a famous person or expert. Consult a book of quotations, or visit a web site like [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com) to search for one. Make sure your quotation is both gripping and relevant to your argument. Here is an example of a quotation from an introduction to a paper on childhood hunger:

*“Children often constitute a large part of the face of hunger and homelessness in our country,” says Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund.*

For some papers, it might be appropriate to quote someone who is not famous, but who is significant to your argument. For example, a paper on childhood hunger might use this quotation:

*“When you’re hungry, you can’t think about anything else,” says seven-year-old Sarah.*

(continued)



Write a quotation for your introduction in the space below:

2. Find statistics that are relevant to your topic. For a paper on childhood hunger, for example, you might write:

*Every day over 13 million children in the United States don't know where their next meal is coming from, according to America's Second Harvest.*

Notice that this example tells where the statistics came from. Never, ever use statistics without telling their source.

Write your statistics in the space below.

3. Write a bold statement about your topic here. You might use the declaration you have already written, or a form of it. Or you might write something new. Here's an example of a bold statement you might use for a paper on childhood hunger:

*While every grocery store in America is bursting with an overwhelming amount of food, children in our country still go to bed hungry.*

Write your bold statement in the space below:

## The Dance

The next part of your introduction is “the dance.” In a few sentences, you size up your argument, just as a wrestler sizes up his opponent. You give information that leads into the argument you are going to be making. Follow the steps below to gather information for this part of your introduction.

1. Write three facts about your topic. These might be facts you learned in your research or facts that you already knew. They should not be facts mentioned in the steps above.

(continued)

Write your facts here:

2. Write three more ideas you would like to convey about your topic. Feel free to write whatever comes to mind, including some of your opinions.

### ***The Punch***

The final part of your introduction is where you land your first punch. English teachers like to call this first punch a thesis statement. A thesis statement lays out your argument with a big wallop. With strong language, you begin a strong argument. Finally, write the complete thesis statement you developed earlier for your paper. If you need to make any changes to it because of what you have learned in your research, now is the time.

Write your thesis statement here:

# Putting It Together

## Version #1

Now that you have completed “The Glitz,” “The Dance,” and “The Punch” steps, you are ready to begin writing your introduction. Although there are many ways to write an introduction, this exercise will show you one simple way. Just complete the sections below, using the information you have already gathered.

**The Glitz.** Choose one of your items from “The Glitz”—the quotation, the statistics, or the bold statement. Use it to begin your introduction. Example:

*“When you’re hungry, you can’t think about anything else,” says seven-year-old Sarah.*

**The Dance.** Follow up with three to five sentences based on your information from “The Dance.” Example:

*According to America’s Second Harvest, Sarah is just one of the over 13 million children in the United States who don’t know if or when they will get their next meal. Since the U.S. is the richest country in the world, it is surprising that so many American children suffer from hunger. Childhood hunger also violates our ideals that everyone has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*

**The Punch.** Write your thesis statement next. Example:

*It is our moral duty to protect U.S. children from hunger because they are innocent, this country has so much, and they are our future.*

**The Complete Introduction.** Next, compile all three items above into one paragraph. You may need to add transitional words to make the paragraph flow better. Example:

*“When you are hungry, you can’t think about anything else,” says seven-year-old Sarah. Sarah is just one of the over 13 million children in the United States, according to America’s Second Harvest, who don’t know if or when they will get their next meal. Since the U.S. is the richest country in the world, it is surprising that so many American children suffer from hunger. Childhood hunger also violates our ideals that everyone has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is our moral duty to protect U.S. children from hunger because they are innocent, this country has so much, and they are our future.*

After you are finished proofreading and revising, you have the first paragraph of your persuasive paper—your introduction.

# Putting It Together

## Version #2

**A**nother approach to writing an introduction allows a writer more freedom and can produce more interesting writing. Try this approach to see if it fits you better.

**Review.** Read over and think about what you wrote in gathering information for “The Glitz,” “The Dance,” and “The Punch.”

**Choose an Opening Line.** Choose an opening line you like from “The Glitz.” Write that sentence at the top of a separate sheet of paper.

**Freewrite.** Using the sentence you just wrote as your opening line, set a timer and freewrite for five minutes. Follow these rules:

- **Don't stop.** Write continuously. Don't lift your pencil or pen from the paper.
- **Don't erase.** Later, you can correct anything you don't like.
- **Don't read over what you are writing.** You can read over what you've written after the timer rings.
- **Don't worry about spelling.** Circle misspelled words so you can go back and fix them later.
- **Leave a blank if you can't think of a word you want.** You can fill in the word later.
- **Don't be afraid to start over.** If you lose your train of thought or run out of ideas before the timer rings, start over from the beginning.

Read over what you've written immediately after time is up. That way you can easily fill in gaps, fix words, and make changes while your thoughts are still fresh.

**Add Your Thesis Statement.** If you haven't done so already, write your thesis statement at the end of your freewriting.

**Revise.** Use what you have written during freewriting as the basis for your introduction. Think carefully as you revise it. Did you include all of the ideas you wanted? Is there anything in your paragraph that doesn't belong? Take out extra words, or add new details.

The result should be a good first draft of your introduction.

# The Conclusion Formula

Writing a conclusion is generally the easiest and most boring step in finishing a persuasive paper. However, it is a very important step. The conclusion is the last thing readers will remember about your argument. It needs to tie up your ideas into a nicely summarized little package and also leave the reader with something to think about.

The conclusion is not the place to introduce new arguments. It should only review points you have already made.

Most conclusions follow a fairly standard formula. A conclusion includes the following:

- Your declaration
- Your *reasons why*
- Something to think about

Look at the “Conclusion Formula” below.

## Conclusion Formula

*Clearly, music sharing on the Internet is good for music.*

---

(Transition) ,                      (Your declaration)

*First of all, it takes music out of big business and gives it back to musicians and listeners.*

---

(Transition) ,                      (First “reason why”)

*Secondly, music has always been created by borrowing from other songs.*

---

(Transition) ,                      (Second “reason why”)

*Finally, music sharing online offers more musicians the opportunity to reach an audience.*

---

(Transition) ,                      (Third “reason why”)

*While the music industry believes the free flow of music online is bad for music, the opposite is true. The Internet offers a creative playing field where more music can be created, shared, and enjoyed by people all over the world.*

---

(Something to think about)

Note: Each of the items above can include one or two sentences.

(continued)

Now it is your turn. Use the form below to help you write the conclusion for your own persuasive paper.

### *Your Declaration*

Transition: \_\_\_\_\_ Your declaration: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### *Your Reasons Why*

Transition: \_\_\_\_\_ First reason why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Transition: \_\_\_\_\_ Second reason why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Transition: \_\_\_\_\_ Third reason why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### *Something to Think About*

Something to think about: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

You now have a rough draft of your conclusion. All you need to do now is revise and proofread.