

Persuasive Writing

What Is Persuasive Writing?

According to the Australian Curriculum:

“ [Persuasive texts] put forward a point of view and persuade a reader, viewer or listener. They form a significant part of modern communication in both print and digital environments. They include advertising, debates, arguments, discussions, polemics and influential essays and articles.

(ACARA, 2009 to present)

We cover a wide variety of different types of persuasive texts in this manual. Some are much more common than others, and you'll find a list of examples on pages 5 and 6.

In reality, text definitions are not set in stone – an advertisement, for example, is designed to persuade but can also inform or tell a story. Furthermore, publication format (e.g. print newspaper, digital news article, tweet, web page, radio show) does not determine whether a text is persuasive. Any text whose purpose is to convince an audience can be defined as persuasive.

As students progress through their school years, they need to become confident communicators who are familiar with many different types of persuasive writing. As adults, they will have to apply for jobs, present business cases, inspire colleagues, voice their opinions and (perhaps most difficult of all) persuade their kids to eat dinner! They also need to be aware when persuasive techniques are being used on them – for example, in political, business and ethical topics of debate. Developing students' persuasive skills will therefore become increasingly important the older they get.

The good news is that everything you already know about teaching effective writing (for narrative and informative) still applies.

Persuasive writing ...

- puts forward a point of view on an issue
- seeks to persuade an audience
- may express an opinion, discuss, analyse and evaluate an issue, but may also entertain and inform
- may be formal (e.g. a cover letter) or informal (e.g. persuading a friend to try a new restaurant)
- structures key arguments in an ordered and rational way (see Step 1: Plan for Success)
- uses evidence to support the arguments, based on personal knowledge or research
- includes a range of persuasive devices (see 'Persuasive Devices Glossary' on pages 9–11)
- is not confined to specific forms (e.g. print, online) and can be multimodal (e.g. a documentary film, a TV advertisement).



Types of Persuasive Writing

The variety of persuasive texts and the many ways they can be presented (including multimodal forms) is mind-boggling. This manual includes examples of different types of persuasive texts in the writing samples and Action Activities. Here is a short list of the most common types:

Advertising

Promotes or sells a product, service or idea

- advertisements (e.g. in magazines, on billboards, on TV)
- promotional material (e.g. marketing brochures, leaflets, samples)
- packaging (e.g. for food, perfume, toys)
- charity leaflets and direct mail appeals (e.g. The Smith Family, The Salvation Army)
- awareness campaigns (e.g. Australian Bushfire Relief, Movember)
- trailers (e.g. for movies, documentaries, TV series)
- slogans (e.g. 'Just Do It', 'Think Different', 'Breakfast of Champions')
- self-promotion (e.g. cover letters, applications, online profiles).



Political discourse

Promotes a political cause or point of view

- debates and panel discussions (e.g. election debates, parliamentary debates, Q&A)
- speeches (e.g. Kevin Rudd's 'Sorry' speech, Greta Thunberg's climate change speeches, Malala Yousafzai's Nobel Prize acceptance speech)
- cartoons (e.g. the work of Cathy Wilcox, Bruce Petty, Mark Knight)
- satire (e.g. *The Shovel*, *Clarke & Dawe*, *Utopia*)
- propaganda (e.g. wartime posters, election campaign posters, spin campaigns, 'greenwashing').



Reviews

Provide an opinion on places, things and events

- travel reviews and blogs (e.g. *TripAdvisor*, *Traveller*, *Time Travel Turtle*)
- film, book, exhibition or theatre reviews (e.g. *Time Out*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Australian Book Review*, *Goodreads*, *Daily Review*, *Stage Whispers*)
- restaurant reviews (e.g. *Good Food Guide*, *Zomato*, *Gourmet Traveller*).



Opinion and Argument Pieces

Express an opinion on a particular issue or situation

- persuasive and argumentative essays (e.g. 'Cats are better than dogs', 'My hero')
- letters to the editor, op-eds and editorials (e.g. *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* 'Opinion' sections)
- protest letters (e.g. written complaint to local council or MP)
- documentaries (e.g. *War on Waste*, *Black Fish*, *Super Size Me*)
- current affairs programs, talk shows, interviews (e.g. *The Project*, *Studio 10*, *7.30*, *The Feed*)



- court/legal debates and other debates (e.g. Mabo vs Queensland)
- presentations (e.g. *Shark Tank*)
- inspirational speeches (e.g. Jessica Watson's speech about following your dreams)
- cause-related blogs and social media (e.g. *The Koori Woman*, Channel 7 *Sunrise* 'Spin Free Zone')
- comedy (e.g. *The Weekly with Charlie Pickering*, *Have You Been Paying Attention?*)
- fables and moral tales (e.g. *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *The Bunyip*)
- persuasive picture books (e.g. *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff, *Can I Have a Stegosaurus, Mom? Can I? Please?!* by Lois G Grambling)
- poetry (e.g. 'My Country' by Dorothea Mackellar, 'The Dawn Is at Hand' by Oodgeroo Noonuccal)
- song and rap lyrics (e.g. 'The Day You Come' by Powderfinger, 'In Control' by Baker Boy).

Remember, the medium or format does not define whether a text is persuasive: its purpose or intent does. For example, not all poetry is persuasive, but a poem that expresses an opinion or point of view in order to persuade the reader is a type of persuasive text.

It is important to expose students to persuasive writing in all its forms in order to give them a full understanding of this text type.

Persuasive Devices Glossary

There is a plethora of persuasive devices that writers can use to convince the reader. Introduce these devices gradually to avoid overloading your students. The stars indicate the level of complexity, with one star being the easiest. Many of these devices feature in examples throughout the manual, as indicated in the definitions. They are highlighted in **bold** in each chapter for ease of reference.



Anecdote[★]

A short, amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person engages the reader and creates a personal connection. It is a great way to start a text (see Step 2: Sizzling Starts) and you can also link to this in the conclusion to create a circular reference (see Step 7: Endings with Impact).



Appeal^{★★★}



The most common appeals use a mix of Ethos, Pathos and Logos (see pages 7–8). Ethos is an appeal based on the authority or credibility of the writer, Pathos is an appeal to the reader's emotions, and Logos is an appeal to logic. However, a writer may also appeal to other values like patriotism or responsibility. Essentially, an appeal is designed to make a reader feel or act in a particular way.



Authoritative statement^{★★}



These are statements that lend weight or authority to an argument and are difficult to argue against. This device is used to convince the audience that the writer is an expert or is referencing an expert on the topic (see Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue). NAPLAN explicitly requires the writer to 'adopt a sense of authority on the subject matter' (ACARA, 2013, p 5).



Conditional mood[★]

This involves using words or phrases such as 'if', 'unless', 'as long as', 'even if', 'even though', or 'on the condition that'. This device is used to show the implications of an issue or situation – e.g. 'If we don't take action against climate change now, it may be too late'.



Comparisons and contrasts^{★★}

Comparisons and contrasts highlight the similarities and differences between two or more issues, examples or points of view. This device, sometimes known as juxtaposition, can be used in several ways, including to appeal to the reader's logic and to build tension by presenting opposing points of view (see Step 3: Tightening Tension).



Direct address to the reader[★]

A statement or message made directly to the reader works in a similar way to rhetorical questions – it draws the reader in and makes them feel personally involved and compelled to take action. A call to action is one example of this device, and it can be used to make a final appeal to the reader (see Step 7: Endings with Impact).

Seven Steps and Persuasive Writing

All kinds of persuasive texts rely on the Seven Steps techniques. Here are some examples:

EXAMPLE	STEP
A persuasive essay needs to be well structured for clarity.	Step 1 Plan for Success
A great book review needs to grab the reader's interest and make them want to know more.	Step 2 Sizzling Starts
Tension is crucial in a political speech to bring the audience on board and keep them listening.	Step 3 Tightening Tension
Current affairs talk shows like <i>The Project</i> validate their arguments by speaking to experts and people involved.	Step 4 Dynamic Dialogue
Charity appeals paint a vivid picture of an issue or situation to engage the audience's emotions and build empathy.	Step 5 Show, Don't Tell
Promotional material needs to be short and snappy to maintain the reader's interest.	Step 6 Ban the Boring
A persuasive documentary must end in a powerful and memorable way in order to change the viewer's actions or beliefs.	Step 7 Endings with Impact

Curriculum Matrix

The Curriculum Matrix lists the Australian Curriculum content descriptions covered by each Step and directs you to the relevant pages in the manual. The activities in this manual are designed for Year 3–6 students but they can easily be adapted for younger or older students.

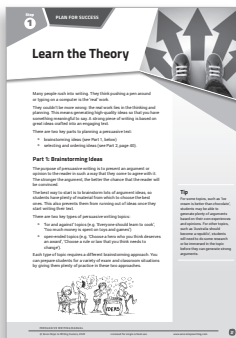
Year 3

LANGUAGE	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6	STEP 7
Language for interaction							
Understand that successful cooperation with others depends on shared use of social conventions, including turn-taking patterns, and forms of address that vary according to the degree of formality in social situations (ACELA1476)	All Action Activities, pp 47–9	All Action Activities, pp 68–70	All Action Activities, pp 84–6	All Action Activities, pp 97–9	AA1, p 109 AA2, p 109 AA4, p 110 AA5, p 111 AA6, p 111	All Action Activities, pp 124–6	All Action Activities, pp 138–40
Examine how evaluative language can be varied to be more or less forceful (ACELA1477)	AA4, p 48 AA5, p 49 AA6, p 49	AA1, p 68 AA2, p 68 AA5, p 70	AA1, p 84 AA2, p 84 AA3, p 85 AA5, p 86 AA6, p 86	AA1, p 97 AA3, p 98 AA5, p 99		AA2, p 124 AA3, p 125 AA4, p 125 AA5, p 126 AA6, p 126	AA1, p 138 AA2, p 138 AA3, p 139 AA4, p 139 AA6, p 140
Text structure and organisation							
Understand how different types of texts vary in use of language choices, depending on their purpose and context (for example, tense and types of sentences) (ACELA1478)	AA4, p 48 AA5, p 49 AA6, p 49	AA1, p 68 AA2, p 68 AA4, p 69 AA5, p 70 AA6, p 70	AA1, p 84 AA2, p 84 AA3, p 85 AA4, p 85 AA6, p 86	All Action Activities, pp 97–9	All Action Activities, pp 109–11	All Action Activities, pp 124–6	All Action Activities, pp 138–40
Understand that paragraphs are a key organisational feature of written texts (ACELA1479)	AA5, p 49 AA6, p 49	AA4, p 69 AA6, p 70	AA4, p 85 AA6, p 86	AA1, p 97 AA5, p 99 AA6, p 99	AA6, p 111	AA5, p 126 AA6, p 126	AA3, p 139 AA4, p 139 AA5, p 140 AA6, p 140
Identify the features of online texts that enhance navigation (ACELA1790)							AA5, p 140

Implementation

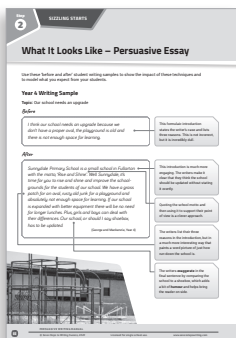
How This Manual Works

This manual assumes that you will introduce the Seven Steps one Step at a time (although not necessarily in order – see page 35 for more implementation advice). The core chapters of the manual (one per Step) contain the following sections to assist with implementation:



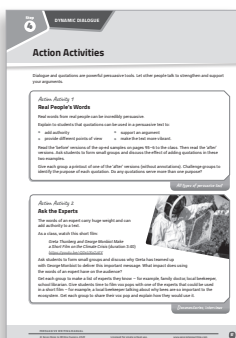
Learn the Theory

The key techniques that underpin each Step are covered at the start of each chapter. Relevant persuasive devices are highlighted in **bold** on the first use, and a complete list with definitions can be found on pages 9–11.



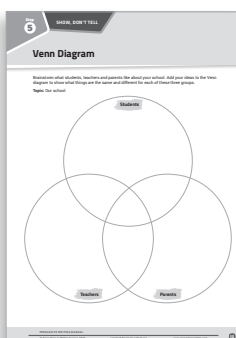
What It Looks Like

Use these writing samples to show the impact of the Seven Steps techniques and to model what you expect from your students.



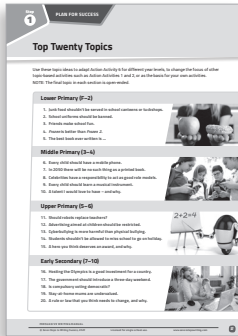
Action Activities

In these short, fun activities, students consolidate their understanding of each Step by practising the techniques. In the first few activities, students analyse examples of the Step in action; in subsequent activities, they create short texts of their own. At the bottom of each Action Activity, we have recommended relevant types of persuasive texts (see pages 5–6).



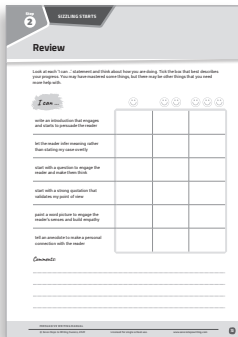
Templates

The templates are used to scaffold students' learning and can be found towards the back of each chapter. Templates are referenced in the relevant Action Activities.



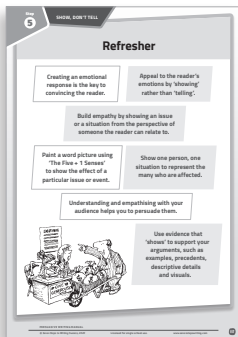
Top Twenty Topics

Use these topic ideas to adapt activities to different year levels, to change the focus of topic-based activities, or as the basis for your own activities.



Review

The self-assessment rubrics can be used by students to evaluate their own progress, and by teachers as the basis for conferencing with students.



Refresher

The key points for each Step are set out on a poster to refresh students' memories.

Putting it all together

When students are ready – or at least are familiar with Steps 1, 2, 3 and 7 – review the 'Putting It All Together' chapter on pages 145–71. The templates in this chapter are designed to guide students through the process of writing a complete text. Once students have mastered the process collaboratively with the use of templates, gradually reduce the scaffolds until they can write independently with creativity and confidence.

This final chapter also includes a marking rubric (pages 162–3) and graded writing samples (pages 166–71) that you can use to assess how students are progressing with the Seven Steps and to assist with reporting.



Eight-Week Starter Plan

How do you start applying the Seven Steps techniques to persuasive writing? Here is a sample plan for the first eight weeks to help you implement the core structural Steps (Steps 1, 2, 3 and 7).

This is only an example; you can change it to suit the needs of your students. For beginner writers you may want to spend more than two weeks on each Step. For advanced writers, you might consider covering one or two Steps a week.

TIMELINE	TOPIC	KEY POINT	WHAT TO REVIEW	ACTIVITIES
Week 1	Introduction	Chunk large tasks – the tennis analogy	Review the Introduction and 'The Five Secrets', with colleagues if collaborating on implementation	
	Step 2: Sizzling Starts	A good introduction should engage and begin to persuade the reader	Learn the Theory, pp 63–5 What It Looks Like, pp 66–7	Do Action Activities 1–2, p 68
Week 2	Step 2: Sizzling Starts	Use a range of techniques and devices to craft a great introduction	Read Sizzling Starts from a range of persuasive texts – 'Types of Persuasive Writing', pp 5–6	Do Action Activities 3–6, pp 69–70 Students complete the self-assessment review, p 75
Week 3	Step 3: Tightening Tension	Build to a crescendo to bring the audience on board	Learn the Theory, pp 77–9 What It Looks Like, pp 80–3	Do Action Activities 1–2, p 84
Week 4	Step 3: Tightening Tension	Use a range of persuasive devices to strengthen the crescendo	Learn the Theory, pp 77–9 What It Looks Like, pp 80–3	Do Action Activities 3–6, pp 85–6 Students complete the self-assessment review, p 90
Week 5	Step 7: Endings with Impact	A great conclusion wraps up the text and leaves a lasting impression on the reader	Learn the Theory, pp 133–5 What It Looks Like, pp 136–7 Look at good and bad endings in a range of persuasive texts	Do Action Activities 1–3, pp 138–9
Week 6	Step 7: Endings with Impact	Combine the ending techniques with persuasive devices for maximum effect	Look at examples of ending techniques and devices in action	Do Action Activities 4–6, pp 139–40 Students complete the self-assessment review, p 143
Week 7	Step 1: Plan for Success	Brainstorm lots of argument ideas for different types of persuasive topics	Learn the Theory – Part 1: Brainstorming Ideas, pp 37–9 What It Looks Like – Part 1: Brainstorming Ideas, pp 42, 44	Do Action Activities 1–3, pp 47–8 Students complete the self-assessment review for Part 1, p 58
Week 8	Step 1: Plan for Success	Select and order ideas on the Persuasive Writing Graph	Learn the Theory – Part 2: Selecting and Ordering Ideas, pp 40–1 What It Looks Like – Part 2: Selecting and Ordering Ideas, pp 42–3, 45–6	Do Action Activities 4–6, pp 48–9 Students complete the self-assessment review for Part 2, p 59

A range of additional persuasive resources is available on our members site (access via sevenstepswriting.com).