

There are some pieces of writing that are explicitly concerned with changing the readers' beliefs, with *persuading readers to believe as the author does*. Such pieces grab the reader by the lapel and say, *Listen to this; look at the evidence; you can't deny I'm right!*

It's true that all writing is rhetorical, trying to convince the reader of something, but in texts that are explicitly argumentative, the voice is more urgently assertive and the structure of the piece is tightly controlled by the shape of the argument. Writers make decisions about what to say next based on the reader's possible objections, and they corral the reader's attention like a border collie chases sheep.

Bomer, Randy. *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School*.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Persuasion: Content Academic Vocabulary

Argument - a series of statements in a text designed to convince the reader of something. What the writer (or speaker) wants to prove is the *position* or *claim*. An argument might appeal to both logic and emotion. For instance, an argument in a scientific or historical journal would probably present only *logical appeals*, which include reasons and factual evidence. An argument in a political text would probably also include *emotional appeals*, which are directed more to the reader's heart than to the mind. Some arguments use loaded words (words loaded with emotional connotations) and *anecdotes* that also appeal to feelings. It is important to be able to recognize emotional appeals used in arguments – and to be aware of how they can persuade an audience without credible evidence.

Author's intent or purpose - determines which mix of logical and emotional appeals is appropriate. A reliance on emotional appeals alone suggest that the writer is unable to back up his or her ideas with hard evidence.

Claim - what the writer (or speaker) wants to prove. Also called an assertion or position.

Connotation - the meaning, association, or emotion that has come to be attached to a word. A connotation can be positive or negative, depending on its context and each reader's past experience. For example, many people would say *thin* has a positive connotation but *skinny* has a negative one. Both *thin* and *skinny* are considered **loaded words** because they have strong emotional connotations.

Content Literacy - being literate in a content area; being able to read, write, think, talk, solve problems, and learn as a mathematician, scientist, historian, poet, etc., about concepts and driving questions in each of these disciplines; being able to identify core ideas and concepts, questions to ask, problems to solve, and having habits of mind or content-specific strategies to examine those ideas, questions, or problems.

Counter-argument/Counter-claim - an opinion that challenges the reasoning behind a position and shows that there are grounds for taking an opposite view.

Credibility - a willingness to believe or accept something as true; the ability to inspire belief or trust.

Denotation - the literal dictionary definition of a word. Denotations are characterized by a neutral, objective tone. For example, *thin* and *skinny* have similar denotations. They each describe a quality of depth or size.

Discourse - orderly thought or procedure; rational conversations. Discourse includes instructional conversations, collaboration, debate, persuasive oral presentations. Discourse can also include writing.

Elaboration - adding information, usually in the form of details. This might include original ideas on a topic or researched information.

Evidence - specific information or proof that supports the reasons/assertions in an argument. Evidence must be precise and relevant, clearly related to the argument. Types of evidence include:

- **Analogies:** comparisons that show similarities between otherwise unrelated facts or ideas. Example: *We should be as concerned about the garbage problem today as they once were about finding a vaccine for polio.*
- **Anecdotes:** personal examples or observations that illustrate a point. Example: *My grandfather says the forests that once surrounded my hometown have nearly vanished.*
- **Case studies:** Examples from scientific research. Example: *Government studies show that collecting and using recycled materials saves energy.*
- **Commonly accepted beliefs:** specific instances or illustrations of a general idea. Example: *Most people think that garbage is useless and has no value.*
- **Examples:** Specific instances or illustrations of a general idea. Example: *For example, recycling could help save some of the fifty thousand trees that are sacrificed every week to produce Sunday newspapers in the U.S.*
- **Expert opinions:** Statements made by a recognized authority on the subject. Example: *Brenda Platt of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance says, "Studies have concluded that recycling costs less than traditional trash collection and disposal..."*
- **Facts:** Statements that can be proven true; some facts are in the form of statistics, or numerical information. Example: *Garbage usually goes into landfills. Of the garbage produced each year in the U.S., 42% is paper.*

Fallacious reasoning - faulty reasoning or mistakes in logical thinking. Fallacious reasoning leads to false or incorrect conclusions. Some types of fallacious reasoning include:

- **Begging the question**, also called circular reasoning, assumes the truth of a statement before it has been proved. Typically, it is a restatement of opinion using different words. Example: *All students in the ninth grade need to get a laptop computer because it's essential for every ninth grader to have one.*
- **Name calling** uses labels to attack a person who holds an opposing view instead of giving reasons or evidence to attack the opposing view itself. This fallacy includes criticizing the person's character, situation, or background. Example: *Why should I listen to someone who doesn't even know who won the World Series?*
- **Stereotyping** gives all members of a group the same (usually undesirable) characteristics. It assumes that everyone (or everything) in that group is alike. Stereotypes are often based on misconceptions about racial, social, religious, gender, or ethnic groups. Example: *Small towns are boring.*
- **Hasty generalization** is a broad, general statement or conclusion that is made without sufficient evidence to back it up. A hasty generalization is often made on the basis of one or two experiences or observations. Insufficient evidence: I read about a healthy eighty-eight-year-old woman who smokes a pack of cigarettes every day. My grandfather smokes, too, and he's in great shape physically. Example (hasty generalization): *Smoking does not affect your health.*
- **Either/or fallacy** assumes that there are only two possible choices or solutions (usually extremes), even though there may be many. Example: *Either I get a cell phone, or you're never going to know where I am after school.*
- **False cause and effect** occurs when one event is said to be the cause of another event just because the two events happened in sequence. You cannot assume that an event caused whatever happened afterward. Example: *Her grades improved when she got a job after school.*

Generalization - a broad statement that applies to or covers many individuals, experiences, situations, observations, or texts. A valid generalization is a type of conclusion that is drawn after considering as many of the facts as possible.

Logic - evidence (facts and examples). An argument is illogical when it does not provide reasons backed by evidence.

Parallelism - the repetition of words, phrases, or sentences that have the same grammatical structure or that state a similar idea. Parallelism, or **parallel structure**, helps make lines rhythmic and memorable and heightens their emotional effect.

Persuasive essay - a way for a writer to share his/her views and convince others to accept them. The goal of a persuasive essay is to state the claim/assertion clearly and support it with reasons and *evidence*. Reasons may include *rhetorical devices*.

Position - a stated idea or opinion that a writer has about a subject or issue.

Primary source - a firsthand account. In primary sources, writers present their experiences, opinions, and ideas. Primary sources include autobiographies, letters, interviews, oral histories, eyewitness news reports, essays, editorials, and speeches.

Rebuttal - to prove something to be false or someone to be in error through logical argument or by providing evidence to the contrary.

Rhetorical devices help a writer support his/her position (thesis). Rhetorical devices appeal to the readers' logic, emotions, or ethical beliefs.

- **Emotional appeal** is aimed at readers' hearts. Emotional appeals speak to emotions such as fear, love, sympathy, and pride. Example: *Recycling keeps us from being buried in trash.*
- **Logical appeal** speaks to readers' common sense and logic. Logical appeals make sense. Example: *Recycling saves precious resources.*
- **Ethical appeal** addresses readers' sense of right and wrong. Ethical appeals also rely on a reader's belief that the writer is ethical. Example: *Recycling reduces the garbage we produce.*

Secondary source - a secondhand account, often based on more than one viewpoint. In secondary sources, writers summarize, interpret, or analyze events in which they did not participate. Examples of secondary sources include encyclopedias and other reference works, textbooks, biographies, many magazine articles, and most newspaper articles.

Text structure - any organizational patterns that writers use to make their meaning clear. The four basic ways to arrange texts include: chronological order, spatial order, order of importance, logical order. Other methods used to organize text are cause and effect, problem-solution, and question-answer.

Tone - the writer's attitude toward his/her subject or audience. If the intent is to persuade, the tone is usually serious, calm, and reasonable. The credibility of the argument becomes an issue if the author uses a humorous, angry, or high emotional tone or if the author exaggerates or tries to make light of various issues.